

THE COLLECTED NOVELS
AND STORIES OF
GUY DE MAUPASSANT

WHEATON COLLEGE
LIBRARY



Norton, Massachusetts
Gift of
Otto H. Sturenburg

A WOMAN'S LIFE

The
Collected
Novels
and
Stories of
Guy
de
Maupassant

✂
Translated and Edited
by Ernest Boyd

A Woman's Life

*by
Guy de Maupassant*



*New York
Alfred A. Knopf
1923*

COPYRIGHT, 1923, BY
ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

Published, March, 1923

PQ
2349
A4
ES2
V.4

82744

*Composition, electrotyping, presswork and binding by
The Plimpton Press, Norwood, Mass.
Paper furnished by W. F. Etherington & Co., New York*

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A WOMAN'S LIFE



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023

https://archive.org/details/bwb_P8-AMU-352

A WOMAN'S LIFE

I.

HAVING packed her trunks, Jeanne went to the window, but it had not stopped raining. The downpour had beaten against the window-panes and the roof all night long. It seemed as if the lowering clouds, heavy with water, had burst, emptying upon the earth, reducing it to pulp and melting it like sugar. Sudden squalls swept by in warm gusts. The roaring of overflowing gutters filled the deserted streets, in which the houses, like sponges, absorbed the moisture which penetrated inside and made the walls perspire from cellar to attic.

Jeanne, who had left the convent the day before, free for ever, at last, and ready to seize upon all the happiness of life, of which she had dreamed so long, feared her father would not start if the weather did not clear, and for the hundredth time since morning she studied the horizon.

Then she noticed that she had forgotten to put her calendar in her travelling bag. She took from the wall the little card divided into months, which bore in the midst of a design the date of the current year, 1819, in gilt figures. Then she crossed off with a pencil the first four columns, drawing a

line through each saint's name until she came to the second of May, the day of her leaving the convent.

A voice outside the door called, "Jeannette!" Jeanne answered: "Come in, papa." And her father appeared.

Baron Simon-Jacques Le Perthuis des Vauds was a gentleman of the Old Régime, eccentric and good-hearted. An enthusiastic disciple of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he had all the tenderness of a lover for nature, for fields, woods and animals.

An aristocrat by birth, he instinctively hated the year 1793; but, being a philosopher by temperament, and liberal by education, he execrated tyranny with an inoffensive and declamatory hatred. His great strength and his great weakness was his good nature, a good nature which had not arms enough to caress, to give, to embrace, a creative good nature, scattered and incapable of resistance, as though a nerve of his will were paralysed; a lack of energy, almost a vice.

A man of theories, he had thought out a whole plan of education for his daughter, desiring to make her happy, good, upright, and tender. She had remained at home up to the age of twelve, when, in spite of her mother's tears, she was placed in the convent of the Sacred Heart.

He had kept her strictly shut up there, cloistered, ignorant of human affairs. He wanted her to return to him chaste, at the age of seventeen, so that he himself might steep her in a sort of bath of poetry; and in the fields, in the midst of the fruitful country, open her soul, and enlighten her ignorance by the

sight of artless love, of the simple tenderness of animals, of the serene laws of life.

She was leaving the convent now, radiant, full of the sources and desires of happiness, ready for all joys, for all the charming adventures which her mind had already gone through in the idleness of her days, during the long nights, in the solitude of her hopes.

She was like a portrait by Paul Veronese, with her fair, shining hair, which looked as if it had coloured her skin, the skin of an aristocrat, slightly tinted with pink, shaded with a light down, a sort of pale velvet, just perceptible when the sun kissed it. Her eyes were blue, that opaque blue which is seen in Dutch china figures. Upon her left nostril she had a little beauty spot, and another to the right upon her chin, where there curled a few tiny hairs so like her skin that they could hardly be seen. She was tall, with a well-developed chest and a supple waist. Her clear voice sounded at times too shrill, but her frank laugh spread happiness about her. Often, with a familiar gesture, she would put her two hands to her temples as if to smooth her hair.

She ran to her father and kissed him with a hug. "Well, are we going?" she asked. He smiled, shook back his already white hair, which he wore rather long, and pointing towards the window said:

"How can you wish to travel in such weather?"

But she begged him, coaxing and tender: "Oh, papa, do let us go. It will clear up in the afternoon."

"But your mother will never consent to it."

"Yes, I promise you that she will. I will answer for it."

"If you succeed in persuading your mother, I am quite willing."

Jeanne hastened to the Baronne's room, for she had awaited this day of departure with a growing impatience. Since entering the Sacred Heart she had not left Rouen, as her father would not allow any distraction before the age which he had fixed. Twice only she had been taken to Paris for a fortnight, but that was another town, and her heart was set on the country. She was going now to pass the summer on their estate of Les Peuples, an old family château situated on the cliff near Yport, and she anticipated boundless joy in the free life beside the sea. Then it was understood that this manor would be given to her, and that she should always live in it when she was married. And the rain, which had been falling ceaselessly since the day before, was the first great sorrow of her existence.

But in three minutes she came running out of her mother's room, crying all through the house: "Papa, papa! Mamma is willing. So have them harness the horses."

The deluge was not lessening, it even seemed to be coming down twice as heavily, when the carriage was driven to the door. Jeanne was ready to get in when the Baronne came downstairs, supported on one side by her husband and on the other by a tall chambermaid, as strong and strapping as a country lad. She was a Norman woman from Caux, who appeared at least twenty, although she was eighteen at the most. She was treated in the family as a second daughter, for she was Jeanne's foster-sister. Her name was Rosalie, and her principal

duty consisted in guiding the steps of her mistress, who had become enormous in the last few years owing to hypertrophy of the heart, of which she was always complaining.

The Baronne, panting a good deal, reached the steps of the old house, looked at the courtyard where the water was streaming, and murmured: "It is really not wise."

With a smile her husband replied: "It is your wish, Madame Adelaide."

As she bore the pompous name of Adelaide, he always preceded it by "Madame" with a slight air of mocking respect. Madame continued her progress and climbed painfully into the carriage, all the springs of which bent under her weight. The Baron sat at her side, and Jeanne and Rosalie took their places on the seat, with their backs to the horses.

The cook, Ludivine, brought piles of rugs, which were spread over their knees, and two baskets, which were concealed beneath the legs of the travelers; then she climbed to the box beside old Simon and wrapped herself in a great rug which entirely covered her. The concierge and his wife came to say good-bye as they shut the carriage door, and received the last orders about the trunks which were to follow in a cart, and so they started. Old Simon, the coachman, his head bowed, his back bent under the rain, disappeared beneath his box-coat with its triple cape; the howling storm beat upon the carriage windows and inundated the roadway.

With the two horses at a rapid trot the carriage

rolled quickly down to the quay, skirted the line of great ships whose masts, yards, and rigging rose up gloomily in the dripping sky, like leafless trees: then it turned into the long boulevard of Mount Riboudet.

Soon they crossed the meadows, and from time to time a weeping-willow, its branches hanging as inertly as a corpse, stood out sombrely through a sheet of rain. The horses' hoofs clattered and the four wheels made circles of mud.

They were silent: even their spirits seemed damped like the earth. The old lady leaned back, pillowed her head and closed her eyes. The Baron gazed at the drenched and monotonous fields with a mournful eye. Rosalie, a parcel on her knees, was dreaming in the animal-like way of the common people. But Jeanne, under this tepid downpour, felt herself reviving like a plant which has been shut up and which has just been restored to the air; and the density of her joy sheltered her heart from sorrow, like foliage. Although she did not speak, she wanted to sing, to stretch out her hand in order to fill it with rain-water which she would drink: and she enjoyed being carried along at full trot by the horses, looking at the desolation of the landscape and feeling herself protected in the midst of this inundation. And under the pelting rain the gleaming backs of the two animals threw off a cloud of steam.

The Baronne gradually fell asleep. Her face, framed by six dangling ringlets, sank lower and lower, weakly supported by the three great billows of her chin, whose final undulations were lost in the full ocean of her bosom. Her head, rising at each

breath, fell again, her cheeks were puffed out, while from between her partly opened lips a loud snore issued. Her husband leaned towards her, and gently placed a little leather pocket-book in her hands which were folded upon her broad stomach.

This touch awakened her; and she gazed at the object with dazed eyes, with the stupid expression of interrupted dreams. The pocket-book dropped and opened. Gold coins and bank-notes were scattered all over the carriage. This completely aroused her, and the gaiety of her daughter was heard in a peal of laughter.

The Baron picked up the money and placing it on her knees said: "This, dear, is all that is left of my farm at Eletot. I sold it to repair Les Peuples, where we shall live so much in future.

She counted six thousand four hundred francs and put them quietly in her pocket. It was the ninth farm thus sold out of the thirty-one which their parents had left to them. They, nevertheless, still possessed an income of about twenty thousand francs from properties which, if properly managed, would have easily yielded them thirty thousand francs a year.

As they lived simply, this income would have been sufficient if there had not been a bottomless hole always open in the house: good-natured generosity. It dried up the money in their hands as the sun dries up the water in the marshes. It flowed, fled, disappeared. How? Nobody knew. One of them frequently said to the other:

"I don't know how it is, but I have spent a hundred francs to-day, without buying anything much."

A WOMAN'S LIFE

This lavishness was, however, one of the great pleasures of their life. They agreed on this point in a way which was both superb and touching.

Jeanne asked: "Is my castle beautiful now?"

The Baron answered gaily: "You shall see, little daughter."

But gradually the violence of the rain lessened: then there was only a sort of mist, a fine dust of whirling rain. The arch of clouds seemed to rise and to lighten: and suddenly through an unseen rift, a long slanting ray of sunshine fell upon the meadows, and the clouds having been rent asunder, the blue heights of the heavens appeared: then the rift widened like the rending of a veil, and a beautiful azure sky, clear and fathomless, spread over the world.

A fresh and gentle breath of wind was felt, like a happy sigh of the earth, and when they skirted gardens or woods they heard at times the sprightly song of a bird, drying his wings. Evening came. Everyone in the carriage was asleep except Jeanne. Twice they stopped at inns to rest the horses and give them oats and water.

The sun had set. Bells were ringing in the distance. In a little village the people were lighting the lamps; and the sky was also lit by myriads of stars. Lighted houses appeared at intervals, piercing the darkness with points of fire; and suddenly behind a hill, through the branches of the fir-trees, the moon rose, red, enormous, and, as it were, heavy with sleep.

It was so mild that the windows were left lowered. Jeanne, exhausted with dreaming, surfeited

with happy visions, was now sleeping. At times the numbed feeling caused by remaining too long in one position made her open her eyes: then she looked out and saw the trees of a farm pass in the clear night, or perhaps some cows, lying here and there in a field, raise their heads. Then she settled in another position, and tried to recapture an interrupted dream; but the continuous rumbling of the carriage filled her ears, tired her mind, and she closed her eyes again, feeling her spirit as stiff and cramped as her body.

At last they stopped. Some men and women were standing before the carriage door with lanterns in their hands. They had arrived. Jeanne, suddenly awakened, quickly jumped out. Her father and Rosalie, lighted by a farmer, almost carried the Baronne, who was absolutely worn out, groaning in distress, and continually repeating in a weak little voice: "Ah! my God! my poor children!" She would not take anything to eat or anything to drink, but went to bed and at once fell asleep.

Jeanne and the Baron had supper together. They smiled as they looked at each other, holding hands across the table; and, both filled with childish joy, they began to inspect the restored manor.

It was one of those big, high Norman residences, both farmhouse and château, built of white stone which had turned gray, and spacious enough to hold a tribe. An immense vestibule divided the house in two and crossed it, opening its great doors on both sides. A double staircase seemed to bestride this entrance, leaving the centre empty, and uniting its two flights of steps on the first floor like a bridge.

On the ground floor to the right was an inordinately large drawing-room, hung with tapestries representing foliage with birds. All the furniture, upholstered in needle-point tapestry, illustrated La Fontaine's Fables: and Jeanne had a shiver of pleasure on seeing again an old chair which she had loved as a child, and which represented the story of the Fox and the Stork.

Beside the drawing-room were the library, filled with old books, and two other unused rooms. At the left were the dining-room with new wainscoting, the linen-room, the butler's pantry, and a little room containing a bath-tub.

A corridor ran along the whole length of the first story, and divided it in two. The ten doors of the ten rooms opened on to this. At the very end, on the right, was Jeanne's apartment. They entered it. The Baron had just had it done up, merely having used the hangings and the furniture which were lying idle in the garret. Tapestries of a Flemish origin, and very old, peopled this place with strange characters.

But when she saw her bed, the young girl shouted with joy. At the four corners, four large oaken birds, all black and gleaming with polish, supported the bed and seemed to be its guardians. The sides represented two great garlands of carved flowers and fruits: and four finely fluted columns terminating in Corinthian capitals supported a cornice of Cupids intertwined with roses.

It stood, monumental, yet very graceful, in spite of the austerity of the wood darkened by time. The counterpane and the hangings of the canopy

shone like two firmaments. They were made of antique silk of a deep blue, were starred in places by large embroidered gold lilies. When she had sufficiently admired it, Jeanne, raising her light, examined the tapestries to make out the subject.

A young nobleman and a young lady dressed in green, red, and yellow, in the strangest fashion, were conversing under a blue tree, on which white fruit was ripening. A fat rabbit of the same colour was nibbling a little grey grass.

Just above the figures, at a conventional distance, one could see five little round houses with pointed roofs and, higher up, almost in the sky, a very red windmill. A flowery pattern ran through all this. The two other panels much resembled the first, except that out of the houses came four little old men clad in the Flemish fashion, and raising their arms to heaven in token of their extreme astonishment and anger.

But the last tapestry represented a drama. Near that rabbit, which was still nibbling, the young man was stretched out apparently dead. The young lady, looking at him, was piercing her bosom with a sword, and the fruits of the tree had become black. Jeanne gave up trying to understand, when she observed in a corner a diminutive little creature, which the rabbit, had he been alive, could have swallowed as easily as a blade of grass. And yet it was a lion.

Then she recognized the misfortunes of Pyramus and Thisbe, and although she smiled at the simplicity of the designs, she felt happy to be inclosed within this adventure of love, which would continually speak to her thoughts of cherished hopes,

and every night this legendary love would hover over her slumbers.

All the rest of the furniture was of the most diverse styles. They were pieces which each generation leaves in the family, and which make of ancient houses a sort of museum, in which all kinds of things are mingled. A superb Louis XIV. chest of drawers, bound in shining brass, was flanked by two Louis XV. arm-chairs, still covered with their silken bouquets. A rosewood writing-table stood opposite the mantelpiece, on which was an Empire clock under a glass globe. It was a bronze beehive upheld by four marble columns above a garden of gilt flowers. A slender pendulum, hanging from the hive through a long slit, swung eternally a little bee with enameled wings over this flower bed. The dial was of painted *faïence*, and set in the side of the beehive. It began to strike eleven. The Baron kissed his daughter and went to his own room. Then Jeanne, with regret, went to bed.

With a last glance she ran over the room, and then extinguished her candle. But the bed, whose head alone was against the wall, had a little window on its left, through which a flood of moonlight streamed, spreading a splash of light on the floor. Reflections were cast upon the walls, pale reflections, feebly caressing the motionless figures of Pyramus and Thisbe. Through the other window, opposite her feet, Jeanne perceived a tall tree, all bathed in a soft light. She turned on her side, shut her eyes, then in a little while opened them again.

She seemed to feel still shaken by the jolting of the carriage, whose rumbling still lingered in her

head. She remained quiet at first, hoping that this repose would make her finally go to sleep: but the impatience of her mind soon spread through her whole body. She had twitchings in her legs, and an increasing fever. Then she got up, and bare-footed, bare-armed, with her long night-dress, which gave her the appearance of a phantom, she crossed the little lake of light spread over the floor, opened her window, and looked out.

The night was so clear that one could see as if it were broad daylight; and the young girl recognized all that country, beloved of her early childhood. There was first, opposite her, a large lawn, yellow as butter, under the nocturnal light. Two giant trees stood before the château, a plane-tree to the north, and a lime to the south. Away at the end of the great stretch of grass, a little grove terminated this domain, sheltered from the ocean gales by five rows of ancient elms, twisted, clipped, eaten away, bent like a roof by the unceasing ocean wind.

This little park was bounded on the right and left by two long avenues of extremely tall poplars, which separated the residence of the owners from the two adjacent farmhouses, one occupied by the Couillard and the other by the Martin family.

These poplars had given their name to the château. Beyond this inclosure stretched a long uncultivated plain, thick with furze, where the breeze whistled and galloped day and night. Then suddenly the rising ground descended to a cliff of a hundred metres, steep and white, bathing its foot in the ocean waves.

Jeanne gazed afar over the wide mottled surface of the sea, which seemed to slumber beneath the

stars. In the sunless calm all the odours of the earth were spread abroad. A jasmine clambering about the lower windows continually exhaled its penetrating breath, which mingled with the lighter fragrance of the growing leaves. Sluggish breezes passed, bringing the strong savours of the saline air and the sticky moisture of the seaweed.

The young girl at first gave herself up to the pleasure of breathing: and the repose of the fields calmed her like a cool bath. All the animals which awake when evening comes and conceal their obscure existence in the tranquillity of the night filled the half-shadows with a silent agitation.

Large birds, which uttered no cries, fluttered through the air like dark shadows; the humming of invisible insects caressed the ear; silent races were run across the grass, heavy with dew, or the dark surface of the deserted roads. Only the melancholy frogs launched their short and monotonous notes into the air.

It seemed to Jeanne that her heart was swelling, filled with whispers like this tranquil night, feeling suddenly a thousand roving desires, similar to those nocturnal animals whose quiverings surrounded her. An affinity united her to this living poetry: and in the soft whiteness of the night she felt strange shivers run over her, the throbbing of impalpable hopes, something like a breath of happiness.

And she began to dream of love.

Love! for two years it had filled her with the increasing anxiety of its approach. Now she was free to love; she had nothing more to do but to

meet *him*. What would he be like? She did not exactly know, and she did not even ask herself the question. It would be *he*, that was all.

She only knew that she would adore *him* with all her soul, and that *he* would cherish her with all *his* strength. They would take walks on evenings like this, beneath the luminous dust that falls from the stars. They would go hand in hand close together, hearing the beating of their hearts, feeling the warmth of their shoulders, mingling their love with the sweet simplicity of the summer nights, so united that by the sole power of their tenderness they would easily penetrate each other's more secret thoughts. And this would continue for ever in the serenity of an indescribable affection.

It seemed to her suddenly that she felt *him* there, near her, and a vague, sensual thrill ran over her from head to foot. She pressed her arm against her breast, with an unconscious gesture, as if to clasp her dream, and upon her lips proffered to the unknown there passed something which almost made her swoon, as if the breath of spring had given her a kiss of love.

Suddenly she heard someone walking on the road, in the night, behind the château. And in an impulse of her perturbed soul, a transport of faith in the impossible, in providential chances, in divine presentiments, in the romantic combinations of fate, she thought, "If it were only *he*?" She listened eagerly to the rhythmic step of the approaching person, sure that he was going to stop at the iron gate to ask hospitality. When he had passed, she felt as sad as after some deception. But she under-

stood the madness of her hopes and smiled at her folly.

Then, when she was calmed a little, she let her mind float on the current of more reasonable reveries, seeking to see the future, planning her existence. She would live here with *him* in their quiet château which overlooked the sea. She would doubtless have two children, a son for *him* and a daughter for herself. And she could see them running over the grass between the plane-tree and the lime, while the father and mother followed them with glances of delight, exchanging looks full of passion above their heads.

And she remained a long, long time musing thus, while the moon, completing her voyage across the heavens, was disappearing in the ocean. The air became cooler. Towards the East the horizon grew lighter. A cock crowed on the farm to the right; another answered from the farm on the left. Their hoarse cries seemed to come from very far away through the partition of the poultry houses; and the stars imperceptibly paling disappeared in the immense vault of the sky.

A little cry of a bird rose somewhere. Twitterings, timid at first, came from the leaves; then they grew bolder, became vibrating, joyous, spreading from branch to branch and from tree to tree. Jeanne suddenly perceived herself to be in a ray of light, and raising her head which she had hidden in her hands, she closed her eyes, dazzled by the splendour of the dawn.

A mountain of empurpled clouds, partly concealed beneath the great avenue of poplars, cast their hues

of blood upon the awakened earth. And slowly, bursting asunder the gleaming clouds, touching with fire the trees, the plains, the ocean, all the horizon, the great flaming globe appeared.

Jeanne felt herself becoming mad with happiness. A delirious joy, an infinite tenderness before the splendour of things drowned her fluttering heart. It was her sun! Her dawn! The beginning of her life! The rising of her hopes! She stretched her arms towards the shining space, with a desire to embrace the sun; she wanted to speak, to utter something divine, like this opening of the day, but she stood paralysed in an impotent enthusiasm. Then, resting her forehead on her hands, she felt her eyes filling with tears, and she wept deliciously.

When she raised her head the superb glory of the dawning day had disappeared. She felt soothed, a little weary, as if chilled. Without shutting the window she threw herself upon the bed, mused a few minutes more, and fell into such a profound sleep that she did not hear her father's calls at eight o'clock and only awoke when he came into her room.

He wanted to show her the improvements of the château, of *her* château. The façade which looked on to the estate was separated from the road by a great court planted with apple-trees. This road, called the parish road, running between the fields of the peasants, joined, half a league away, the main road from Havre to Fécamp.

A straight avenue ran from the wooden fence to the steps of the house. The outbuildings, small structures, made of pebbles, roofed with thatch,

lined both sides of the court, along the ditches of the two farms.

The covers had been newly done over: all the woodwork had been restored, the walls repaired, the rooms repapered, and all the interior repainted. And on the weather-beaten old manor the new shutters of silver white and the recent plastering on its great grayish façade stood out prominently. The other façade, in which was one of Jeanne's windows, looked out upon the distant sea, above the grove and the wall of elms beaten with the wind.

Jeanne and the Baron, arm in arm, inspected everything, not omitting a corner; they walked slowly through the long avenue of poplars which inclosed what was called the park. The grass had sprouted beneath the trees, spreading its green carpet. The grove at the end was charming, with its crooked little paths, separated by partitions of foliage. A hare suddenly started, and frightened the young girl; then it leaped the embankment and scampered off through the furze towards the cliff.

After breakfast, as Madame Adelaide, still exhausted, declared that she was going to lie down and rest, the Baron proposed to go down to Yport. They started, just passing through the hamlet of Etouvent, in which Les Peuples was situated. Three peasants saluted them as if they had always known them. They entered the sloping woods running down to the sea, as they followed a winding valley. Soon the village of Yport appeared. Women who were mending clothes, seated at the threshold of their homes, watched them pass. The sloping road,

with a gutter in the middle and heaps of refuse lying about before the doors, exhaled a strong odour of brine.

The brown nets in which here and there gleaming scales remained, like small coins, were drying before the doors of the houses, whence came the sounds of numerous families swarming in one room. A few pigeons were walking along the edge of the gutter, looking for food.

Jeanne looked at all this, which seemed curious and new to her, like a scene in a theatre. But suddenly as they turned the corner of a wall, she perceived the sea, of a smooth, deep blue, stretching out of sight. They stopped, opposite the beach, to look. Some sails were passing in the distance, white as the wings of birds. To the right and left rose the enormous cliff. A sort of cape stopped the view on one side, while on the other side the coast line was indefinitely prolonged until it became nothing but an imperceptible point.

A harbour and some houses appeared at the foot of one of the neighbouring inlets; and tiny waves rolled with a light noise upon the shingle, making a fringe of foam upon the water. The boats of the country, hauled upon the slope of round pebbles, lay upon their sides, stretching their round cheeks, varnished with tar, to the sun. Some fishermen were getting them ready for the evening tide. A sailor approached to offer some fish, and Jeanne bought a brill, which she wanted to carry to Les Peuples herself.

Then the man offered his services if they wanted a row, repeating his name time and time again to impress it on their memories: Lastique, Joséphin

A WOMAN'S LIFE

Lastique. The Baron promised not to forget him, and they took the road back to the château.

As the big fish tired Jeanne, she passed her father's walking-stick through its gills. Each took one end and they went along gaily climbing the hill, chatting like two children, their foreheads to the wind and their eyes shining, while the brill, which gradually fatigued their arms, swept the grass with its fat tail.

II.

A CHARMING life of freedom began for Jeanne. She read, dreamed, and wandered about, all alone, in the neighbourhood. She loitered along the woods, her mind in a dream; or perhaps she scampered down the crooked little valleys whose two sides bore a carpet of furze like a cloak of gold. Their sweet and fragrant odour, increased by the heat, intoxicated her like a perfumed wine; and to the distant sounds of the waves rolling on the beach, a billow lulled her spirit.

Lassitude occasionally made her stretch herself out on the thick grass of a hillside; and at times, when she suddenly perceived at a turn of the valley, through a grassy funnel, a triangle of blue sea sparkling in the sunshine with a sail on the horizon, there came to her inordinate joys as at the mysterious approach of happiness hovering over her.

A love of solitude seized her in the sweetness of this fresh country and in the calm of the rounded horizons, and she remained so long seated on the hilltops that the little wild rabbits gambolled at her feet.

She often ran along the cliff, caressed by the soft air of the coast, vibrating with an exquisite enjoyment in moving without fatigue, like the fish in the

water or the swallows in the air. She sowed memories everywhere as seeds are cast upon the earth, memories whose roots hold till death. It seemed to her that she cast a little of her heart into every fold of these valleys.

She began to go in passionately for bathing. She swam almost out of sight, being strong and sturdy and unconscious of danger. She felt well in this cold, limpid, blue water which bore her up and rocked her to and fro.

When she was far from the shore, she floated on her back, her arms crossed upon her chest, her eyes lost in the profound azure of the sky, which the flight of a swallow quickly cleft, or the white silhouette of a sea-bird. No other sound was heard than the distant murmur of surf on the shingle, and a vague noise of the land still welling beneath the undulations of the waves, but confused and almost imperceptible. And then Jeanne righted herself in the water and, in the distraction of joy, uttered sharp cries as she struck out with both hands.

Sometimes when she ventured too far a boat went out for her. She came back to the château pale with hunger, but light, alert, with a smile on her lips and her eyes beaming with happiness.

The Baron, on his part, planned great agricultural enterprises, he wanted to make trials, to organize progress, to experiment with new implements, to acclimatize foreign varieties; and he spent part of his days in conversation with peasants who shook their heads, incredulous at his attempts. Often also he went to sea with the sailors of Yport. When he had visited the grottoes, the springs, and the

rocks of the vicinity, he wanted to fish like a common sailor.

On breezy days when the filled sails made the chubby shells of the boats fly over the waves, and when over each side dragged, almost to the bottom of the sea, the long fleeing lines which schools of mackerel pursued, he held in his hand, which trembled with eagerness, the little line which vibrates as soon as a hooked fish begins to struggle.

By moonlight he would go off to bring in the nets which had been placed the night before. He loved to hear the mast creak, to breathe in the fresh and whistling squalls of the night; and after having tacked a long time, to find the buoys, guiding himself by a peak of rocks, the roof of a belfry, or the Fécamp lighthouse, he delighted to remain motionless beneath the first gleams of the rising sun, which made the slimy backs of the large fan-shaped rays and the fat stomachs of the turbot glisten on the deck of the boat.

At each repast he enthusiastically recounted his expeditions, and the Baronne in her turn told how many times she had walked through the great avenues of poplars, the one on the right, towards Couillard farm, the other one not having sufficient sun.

As she had been recommended to take exercise, she insisted on walking. As soon as the chill of the night had disappeared, she descended, leaning on Rosalie's arm, wrapped in a cloak and two shawls, with her head concealed in a black hood which was covered in addition by a red knitted scarf.

Then dragging her left foot, which was a little heavier, and which had already traced throughout

the whole length of the road, one in going and the other in returning, two dusty trails, where the grass was dead, she began unceasingly to journey in a straight line from the angle of the château to the first shrubs of the grove. She had had a bench placed at each end of this track; and every five minutes she stopped, saying to the poor patient maid who assisted her, "Let us sit down, my girl, I am a little tired."

And at each stop she would leave on one of the benches, now the knitted scarf which covered her head, now one shawl and then the other, then the hood, then the cloak; and all this made at both ends of the avenue two big parcels of clothing which Rosalie would carry on her free arm when they came in to breakfast.

And in the afternoon the Baronne began in a more moderate way, with longer rests, even having a nap of an hour from time to time on a reclining-chair which was rolled outdoors for her.

She called this taking "her exercise," as she would say, "my hypertrophy."

A physician, consulted ten years previously, had spoken of hypertrophy because she had suffered from shortness of breath. Since that time this word, of whose significance she had little knowledge, had remained in her head. She obstinately made the Baron, Jeanne, and Rosalie sound her heart, which nobody could feel any more, so deeply was it covered by the adipose tissue of her chest; but she energetically refused to have herself examined by any new physician, for fear that he would discover other diseases. She spoke of "her" hypertrophy on all oc-

casions, and so often that it seemed as if this malady was special to her, and belonged to her as something unique, over which no one else had any right.

The Baron would say, "My wife's hypertrophy" and Jeanne, "Mamma's hypertrophy," as they would have mentioned her dress, her hat, or her umbrella.

She had been very pretty in her youth and as slender as a reed. After having waltzed in the arms of every regiment of the Empire, she had read "Corinne," which made her cry, and she had remained ever since as if that novel had left its imprint upon her.

As her figure grew stouter her soul had been seized by the most poetical impulses, and when obesity had restricted her to an easy-chair, her thoughts wandered through tender adventures of which she fancied herself the heroine. She had some favourite ones which she always recalled in her reveries, as a music-box, when wound up, interminably repeats the same air. All the languorous novels, in which captives and swallows are mentioned, infallibly filled her eyes with tears: and she liked even certain indecent songs of Béranger on account of the regretful sorrows which they expressed.

She often remained motionless for hours, abstracted in these day-dreams, and her home, Les Peuples, was infinitely pleasing to her because it furnished a frame for the romances of her soul, reminding her by the surrounding woods, by the lonely heaths and by the neighbourhood of the ocean, of the books of Sir Walter Scott, which she had been reading for some months.

On rainy days she remained shut up in her room for the purpose of visiting what she called "her relics." These were all her old letters, letters from her father and mother, letters from the Baron when they were engaged, and still others. She had locked them in a mahogany writing table, with brass spikes at the corners, and she would say in a peculiar voice: "Rosalie, my girl, bring me the drawer with the souvenirs."

The maid would open the writing-table, take out the drawer, and place it on a chair beside her mistress, who began slowly to read these letters one by one, letting a tear fall upon them from time to time.

Jeanne sometimes took the place of Rosalie, and walked with her mother, who told to her the memories of her childhood. The young girl saw herself in the stories of the past, being astonished at the similarity of their thoughts, at the kinship of their desires; for each heart imagines itself the first to have trembled thus beneath a crowd of sensations which have made the hearts of the first beings beat, and will yet make those of the last men and women palpitate.

Their slow pace followed the slowness of the story which was sometimes interrupted for a few seconds by shortness of breath; and then Jeanne's mind, leaping over the adventures which had been begun, threw itself towards a future filled with joys, and revelled in hopes. One afternoon as they were resting on a bench, they suddenly perceived at the end of the avenue a stout priest who was coming towards them. He greeted them with a bow while

still at a distance, assumed a smiling air, bowed again when he was three feet away, and cried:

"Well, Madame la Baronne, how are we?" It was the village priest.

The Baronne, born in the century of philosophers, brought up by a father who was not very orthodox, in the days of the Revolution, did not often go to church, although she liked priests from a sort of religious instinct which women possess. She had entirely forgotten the Abbé Picot, her priest, and blushed as she saw him. She made excuses for not having anticipated his call, but the good man did not seem at all hurt; he looked at Jeanne, complimented her on her appearance, sat down, placed his three-cornered hat upon his knees, and wiped his brow. He was very stout, very red, and perspired profusely. He drew from his pocket every moment an enormous handkerchief wet with sweat, and passed it over his face and his neck, but hardly was the damp linen replaced in the hidden recesses of his robe when new beads of sweat accumulated on his skin and falling upon his soutane, which his stomach distended, marked the flying dust of the roads in little round spots.

He was jolly, a true country priest, tolerant, garrulous, and kind. He told stories, spoke of the people of the country and did not seem to notice that his two parishioners had not yet attended service, the Baronne reconciling her indolence with her confused faith, and Jeanne too happy at being freed from the convent, where she had been satiated with pious ceremonies.

The Baron appeared. His pantheistic religion

left him indifferent to dogmas. He was friendly with the Abbé, whom he had known for a long time, and kept him to dinner. The priest knew how to make himself agreeable, thanks to that unconscious astuteness which the handling of souls gives to the most mediocre men who are called by the chance of events to exercise a power over their fellows.

The Baronne paid him every attention, attracted perhaps by one of those affinities which draw similar natures together, the ruddy face and short breath of the stout man being pleasing to her puffing obesity.

Towards dessert he became filled with priestly merriment, the gaiety that follows a good meal. And suddenly he cried as if a happy idea had crossed his mind: "I have a new parishioner whom I must introduce to you, Monsieur le Vicomte de Lamare."

The Baronne, who had at the ends of her fingers all the peerage of the province, inquired:

"Is he of the family of Lamare of Eure?"

The priest replied:

"Yes, Madame, he is the son of the Vicomte Jean de Lamare, who died last year."

Then Madame Adelaide, who loved the nobility above everything, asked a lot of questions, and learned that, after paying his father's debts, he had sold the family château and established himself in one of the three farms which he possessed in the commune of Etouvent. These estates represented in all an income of five or six thousand francs; but the Vicomte was economical and wise and counted on living simply for two or three years in the modest cottage in order to save enough to cut

some figure in society, to marry to advantage without contracting debts or mortgaging his farms.

The priest added: "He is a charming fellow; and so steady and quiet. But there is not much to amuse him around here."

The Baron said: "Bring him to see us, Monsieur l'Abbé; that will amuse him from time to time." And then they spoke of other things.

When they entered the drawing-room, after having taken coffee, the priest asked permission to take a stroll in the garden, as he was in the habit of taking a little exercise after his meals. The Baron accompanied him. They slowly walked the length of the white façade of the château, retracing their steps. Their shadows, one thin and the other round and wearing a mushroom hat, came and went, now before them, now behind them, according as they walked towards the moon or turned their backs upon it. The priest chewed a sort of cigarette which he had taken from his pocket. He explained its use with the frankness of country folk:

"This helps to make me belch, because my digestion is a little slow."

Then suddenly looking at the sky, across which the clear moon was travelling, he said: "A man is never weary of that spectacle." And he went in to take his leave of the ladies.

III.

THE following Sunday the Baronne and Jeanne went to mass, impelled by a delicate sentiment of deference for their priest. They waited after the service in order to invite him for lunch on Thursday. He came out of the sacristy with a tall elegant young man who held him familiarly by the arm. As soon as he saw the two ladies, he made a gesture of pleased surprise and cried:

“How fortunate this is! Permit me, Madame la Baronne and Mademoiselle Jeanne, to present your neighbour, Monsieur le Vicomte de Lamare.”

The Vicomte bowed, spoke of his long desire to make the acquaintance of the ladies, and began to converse easily, as a man of society who had seen life. He possessed one of those lucky faces about which women dream and which are disagreeable to all men. His black curly hair shaded his smooth and sunburned brow, and two heavy eyebrows, so regular that they looked artificial, rendered deep and tender his dark eyes, whose whites seemed a little tinged with blue.

His long and close eyelashes lent to his glance that passionate eloquence which creates havoc in the hearts of haughty society ladies, and makes the girl in a bonnet carrying a basket in the streets turn

around. The languorous charm of those eyes made every one believe in the depth of his thoughts and gave importance to his slightest words. A thick beard, glossy and fine, concealed a chin which was a trifle too heavy. They separated after many compliments.

Two days later Monsieur de Lamare made his first call. He arrived as they were trying a rustic bench, placed that very morning beneath the tall plane-tree opposite the drawing-room windows. The Baron wanted to have another placed under the windows of the limes to keep it company. The Baronne, who disliked symmetry, did not want this. The Vicomte, on being consulted, was of the Baronne's opinion. Then he spoke of the country, which he declared very picturesque, having discovered many delightful views in his lonely walks.

From time to time, as if by chance, his eyes met Jeanne's; and she felt a singular sensation at this brusque glance, and quickly turned away from a look in which a caressing admiration and an awakened sympathy appeared.

Monsieur de Lamare's father, who had died the preceding year, had known very well an intimate friend of Monsieur des Cultaux, the Baronne's father: and the discovery of this acquaintance started an endless conversation about family relations and dates. The Baronne accomplished great feats of memory, settling the ancestry and descendants of other families, wandering in the complicated labyrinth of genealogies without ever getting lost.

"Tell me, Vicomte, have you ever heard of the Saunoy family of Varfleur? The oldest son Gontran

married a Mademoiselle de Coursil, a Coursil-Courville, and the younger son, one of my cousins, Mademoiselle de la Roche-Aubert, who was related to the Crisange family. Now Monsieur de Crisange was the intimate friend of my father and must also have known yours."

"Yes, Madame. Isn't that the Monsieur de Crisange who emigrated and whose son ruined himself?"

"Precisely. He had asked for the hand of my aunt in marriage after the death of her husband, Comte d'Eretry; but she did not want him because he took snuff. Do you know, by the way, what became of the Viloises? They left Touraine towards 1813, after reverses of fortune, to settle in Auvergne, and I haven't heard of them since."

"I believe, Madame, that the old Marquis was killed by a fall from his horse, leaving one daughter who was married to an Englishman, and another who was married to a certain Bassolle, a rich merchant, who, they say, had seduced her."

And the names learned in childhood, and retained since then in the conversations of old relations, came back to her. And the marriages of these families of equal rank assumed in their minds the importance of great public events. They spoke of people whom they had never seen as if they were well acquainted with them; and the other people, in other districts, spoke of them in the same way; and they felt acquainted at a distance, almost friends, almost relations, by the mere fact of belonging to the same class, the same caste, and of being of equal birth.

The Baron, whose nature was rather rough, and whose education made him differ from the beliefs

and principles of people of his set, knew little of the families of the neighbourhood. He questioned the Vicomte about them.

Monsieur de Lamare answered: "Oh, there are not many of the nobility in the district," in the same tone in which he would have declared that there were not many rabbits on the hillsides; and he gave particulars. Only three families lived within a sufficiently short radius: the Marquis de Coutelier, a sort of chief of the Norman aristocracy; the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville, persons of excellent family but keeping themselves rather isolated; and, finally the Comte de Fourville, a kind of bogey who was said to be killing his wife with sorrow and who lived like a huntsman in his château of La Vrilllette, built near a pond. Some parvenus, who associated with each other, had bought estates here and there. The Vicomte did not know them.

He took his leave, and his last glance was for Jeanne, as if he addressed to her a special farewell, more cordial and more tender. The Baronne found him charming, and above all, very good form. The Baron remarked: "Yes, certainly, he is a gentleman."

They invited him to dinner the following Sunday. He came quite regularly after that. He generally arrived, about four o'clock in the afternoon, joining the Baronne in "her avenue" and offering her his arm to take "her exercise." When Jeanne had not gone out, she supported the Baronne on the other side, and all three walked slowly back and forth from one end of the avenue to the other. He spoke little to the young girl, but his eyes, which seemed

of black velvet, often met Jeanne's eyes, which might have been made of blue agate. Very often they both went down to Yport with the Baron.

As they were on the beach one evening, old Lastique approached them, and without taking from his mouth his pipe, the absence of which would have astonished people more than the disappearance of his nose, he said:

"With that wind, Monsieur le Baron, we could easily get to Étretat and back to-morrow."

Jeanne clasped her hands: "Oh! papa, let us do it!" The Baron turned toward Monsieur de Lamare:

"Will you come, Vicomte? We will go and have lunch there." And the excursion was decided upon at once.

Jeanne was up at dawn. She waited for her father who was slower in dressing, and they started to walk in the dew, crossing first the plain, and then the woods vibrant with the singing of birds. The Vicomte and old Lastique were seated on a capstan.

Two other sailors helped them to make a start. The men placing their shoulders against the sides of the boat pushed with all their strength. They advanced with difficulty over the beach. Lastique slipped some guard rollers of wood beneath the keel; then, taking up his position again, uttered in a drawling voice his interminable "Oh, yeo, ho!" intended to regulate the general effort.

But when they came to the slope the boat started, all of a sudden, and slid down upon the round pebbles with a great sound like a torn sail. It stopped short at the foam of the little waves and all took

their places on board; then the two sailors who stayed on shore shoved the boat off.

A light but steady breeze, blowing from off shore, skimmed and wrinkled the surface of the water. The sail was hoisted, it bellied a little, and the boat started gently, hardly rocked by the sea.

They stood off at first. Towards the horizon the blending sky mingled with the ocean. Towards the shore, the high, steep cliff cast a broad shadow at its foot, and the sunny slopes of turf indented it at certain spots. Behind them in the distance the brown sails were leaving the white pier of Fécamp, and, before them a rock of strange shape, rounded and flooded with light, looked like an enormous elephant burying its trunk in the waves. It was the harbour of Étretat. Jeanne, holding the weather-board with one hand, a little dizzy with the rocking of the waves, looked far away; and it seemed to her that only three things were truly beautiful in creation: light, space, and water.

No one spoke. Old Lastique, who held the tiller and the sheet, took a nip occasionally from a bottle hidden under the seat, and unceasingly smoked his stump of a pipe which seemed inextinguishable. There continually rose from it a slender thread of blue smoke, while another similar one escaped from the corner of his mouth. Yet no one ever saw the sailor light his bowl of clay, blacker than ebony, or fill it with tobacco. Sometimes he took it in one hand, removed it from his lips, and from the same corner from whence issued the smoke, he squirted into the sea a long jet of brown saliva.

The Baron, seated in the bow, looked after the sail,

taking the place of a sailor. Jeanne and the Vicomte sat side by side, both a little embarrassed. An unknown power made their eyes meet when they raised them at the same moment, as if an affinity had impelled them; for there already floated between them that subtle and vague tenderness which springs up so quickly between two young people, when the young man is not ugly and the girl is pretty. They felt happy near each other, perhaps because they were thinking of each other.

The sun was rising as if to view from a higher plane the vast sea stretched beneath it. But the sea was coquettish and clothed herself in a light mist which veiled her from its rays. It was a transparent fog, very low and golden, which did not really conceal anything, but rendered the distance softer. The orb darted its flames to melt this shining cloud; when it was in all its strength the vapour evaporated, disappeared, and the ocean, smooth as a mirror, began to glisten in the light.

Jeanne murmured with emotion: "How beautiful it is!" The Vicomte assented. The serene brilliancy of the morning awakened an echo in their hearts.

Suddenly they saw the great arches of Étretat like two legs of the cliff standing in the sea, high enough for vessels to pass under them; while a point of rock, white and sharp, rose in front of the first arch. They reached the shore, and while the Baron, getting out first, held the boat to the bank by its painter, the Vicomte took Jeanne in his arms in order to put her ashore without letting her wet her feet. Then they went up the shingly beach,

side by side, both moved by this close entwining, and they suddenly overheard old Lastique say to the Baron:

"It is my opinion that they would make a fine couple."

The breakfast in a little inn near the beach was charming, and while the ocean had lulled their thoughts and their tongues and had made them silent, the breakfast table made them as talkative and garrulous as school-boys on a holiday. The simplest things gave then endless merriment.

Old Lastique, seating himself at the table, carefully hid his lighted pipe in his cap; and they laughed at that. A fly, attracted no doubt by his red nose, kept alighting on it; and when he brushed it off, with a hand too slow to catch it, it would post itself on a muslin curtain, which many of its fellows had already specked, and seemed carefully to watch the sailor's highly coloured proboscis, for it would soon again fly back to it.

At each of the flights of this insect they shouted with laughter; and when the old man bothered by this tickling, muttered: "It is damned persistent," Jeanne and the Vicomte laughed till the tears came into their eyes, stifling their outbursts with their napkins.

When coffee had been served Jeanne said: "Let us take a little walk?"

The Vicomte rose, but the Baron preferred to bask in the sun on the beach. "Go on, my children, you will find me here in an hour."

They passed in a straight line the few cottages of the place; and after going beyond a little château,

which resembled a big farmhouse, they found themselves in an open valley extending before them.

The motion of the sea had wearied them, disturbing their ordinary equilibrium, the strong saline air had made them hungry, then the food had appeased them, and the merriment had weakened them. They now had a wild longing to run madly through the fields, and Jeanne felt a humming in her ears; she was full of emotion from so many new and rapidly changing sensations.

A scorching sun was shining on them. On both sides of the road the ripened harvest bent under the heat. The locusts were calling, numerous as the blades of grass, uttering everywhere in the wheat, in the rye, in the furze of the slopes, their thin, shrill cry.

No other voice was heard beneath the torrid sky, of a glittering blue, shading to yellow, as if it were about to turn red, after the manner of metals too near a fire.

Having observed a little grove further on, towards the right, they went to it. Inclosed between two slopes a narrow path stretched beneath tall trees impenetrable to the sun. A kind of moist freshness in the air was perceptible, that dampness which makes the skin shiver and penetrates the lungs. The grass had disappeared for want of sunlight, and the ground was carpeted with moss.

"Come, we can sit down there a little while," said Jeanne. Two old trees had died, and taking advantage of the opening made in the foliage a flood of light descended there, warmed the earth, awakened the germs of the grass, of the dandelions

and the convolvuli, made the little white flowers, fine as a mist, bloom, and the foxgloves abound. Butterflies, bees, innumerable hornets, gnats which resembled the skeletons of flies, a thousand flying insects, some red and spotted, some of greenish hues, others black, with horns, peopled this hot and luminous recess, hidden in the cold shadows of the heavy foliage.

They sat down, their heads in the shade and their feet in the sun. They gazed at all this swarming tiny life which a ray of light caused to appear, and Jeanne kept repeating with emotion:

"How delightful it is! How delicious the country seems. There are moments when I would like to be a fly, or a butterfly to hide myself in the flowers."

They spoke of themselves, their habits and tastes, in that low, intimate tone in which confidences are told. He said that he was already disgusted with the world, tired of his futile life; it was always the same thing; there was no truth, no sincerity in it. The world! she would have liked to know it; but she was convinced beforehand that it was not equal to a country life. And the nearer their hearts seemed to be in sympathy, the more ceremoniously they called each other "Monsieur" and "Mademoiselle," the more smiling and simultaneous became their glances, and it seemed to them that a new feeling of benevolence was awakened in them, a wider sympathy, an interest in a thousand things about which they had never concerned themselves.

They went back, but the Baron had set off on foot for the *Chambre des Demoiselles*, a grotto

in a ridge of the cliff, and they waited for him at the inn. He did not appear until five in the evening, after a long walk along the cliffs. They got into the boat. The boat went gently, scarcely seeming to make any headway, the wind blowing from behind with hardly any motion. The breeze came in slow and tepid puffs which filled the sail for a second, then let it flap limply along the mast. The opaque sea appeared dead; and the sun worn with its labours in following its rounded path softly approached the horizon. The lulling motion of the ocean made everyone silent.

Jeanne finally said: "How I should love to travel!"

The Vicomte replied: "Yes, but it is lonely to travel by yourself; there must be at least two to exchange impressions."

She reflected a moment: "It is true — but I like to walk alone — it is delightful to dream all alone."

He looked at her intently. "Two can dream together," he said.

She lowered her eyes. Was it a hint? Possibly. She gazed at the horizon as if to discover something still further off; then she said slowly, "I should like to go to Italy — and Greece — ah! yes, Greece — and to Corsica; it must be so wild and so beautiful!" But he preferred Switzerland on account of the *châlets* and the lakes.

"No," she said: "I like new countries, like Corsica, or very old countries full of memories, like Greece. It must be delightful to find the traces of peoples whose history we have known since childhood, and to see places where great things have been accomplished."

A WOMAN'S LIFE

The Vicomte, less romantic, declared: "As for me, England attracts me strongly; there is so much to be learned there."

Thus they talked about the universe, discussing the attractions of each country, from the poles to the equator, going into ecstasies over imaginary landscapes and the odd customs of certain peoples like the Chinese and the Laplanders; but they arrived at the conclusion that the most beautiful country in the world was France, with its temperate climate, cool in summer, mild in winter, its rich soil, its green forests, its great calm rivers, and that worship of the fine arts which has existed nowhere else since the great centuries of Athens.

Then they were silent. The sun, sinking lower, seemed to bleed; and a broad luminous track, a dazzling train of light, ran over the water from the horizon to the edge of their boat. The last puffs of wind died away; every ruffle was smoothed and the motionless sail was red. A limitless calm seemed to settle down on space, to spread silence around this conjunction of the elements; while, offering her gleaming bosom, the sea, a monstrous bride, awaited her fiery lover now descending to her. Hastening to his fall, he empurpled her with the desire of their embrace. Now he joined her; and little by little, she devoured him. Then a fresh breeze seemed to arise; a shiver went over the surface of the water, as if the engulfed orb cast a sigh of satisfaction across the world.

The twilight was short: night fell, with its myriad stars. Old Lastique took the oars: and they all observed that the sea was phosphorescent. Jeanne

and the Vicomte, side by side, watched the fitful gleams in the wake of the boat. They thought little, gazing vaguely, breathing in the beauty of the evening with a delicious contentment; and as Jeanne had one hand on the seat a finger of her neighbour touched her, as if by accident, she did not move, surprised, happy, and confused at this slight contact.

When she retired that evening, she felt strangely disturbed and so softened that everything made her wish to cry. She looked at her clock, thought that the little bee on the pendulum was beating like a heart, a friend's heart; that it was aware of her whole life, that it would accompany her joys and sorrows with this lively and regular ticking; and she stopped the gilded insect to imprint a kiss upon its wings. She would have kissed anything, no matter what. She remembered hiding in the bottom of a drawer an old doll of bygone days; she looked for it, found it with the joy a person feels on meeting dear old friends; and pressing it to her heart, she covered its painted cheeks and curly hair with kisses.

And while she held it in her arms she thought: Was *he* really the husband, promised by a thousand secret voices, whom an all-wise Providence had thus thrown across her path? Was he really the being created for her, to whom she would devote her existence? Were they the two predestined beings whose united affections should entwine, indissolubly mingle and engender *love*?

She did not, as yet, feel those tumultuous impulses of her whole being, those mad raptures, those deep

stirrings which she thought were passion. It seemed to her, nevertheless, that she was beginning to fall in love, for she felt at times quite weak thinking of him; and she thought of him incessantly. His presence moved her heart; she blushed and grew pale when she met his glance and trembled when she heard his voice.

She slept very little that night. Then, from day to day, the longing for love increased. She consulted herself continually, consulted the daisies, too, and the clouds, and coins tossed in the air. One evening, her father said to her: "Make yourself pretty to-morrow morning."

She asked: "Why, papa?"

He answered: "It is a secret."

And when she came down the next morning, looking fresh in a pretty light dress, she found the drawing-room table covered with boxes of bonbons, and on a chair an enormous bouquet. A wagon entered the courtyard, bearing the inscription, "Lerat, Confectioner, Wedding Breakfasts, Fécamp," and Ludivine and a kitchen maid were taking out from the back of the wagon big flat baskets which had an appetizing smell.

The Vicomte de Lamare appeared. His trousers were tight and strapped down under his dainty patent leather boots which showed the smallness of his feet. His long frock-coat, fitted to his figure, was open at the bosom showing the lace of his ruffle; and a fine neckcloth, with many folds, made him hold high his handsome dark head, with its grave and distinguished bearing. His air was unusual, that air which special dress lends to the most familiar faces.

Jeanne, astonished, looked at him as if she had never seen him before; she thought him supremely the gentleman, a grand seigneur from head to foot.

He bowed smilingly, saying: "Well, my little friend, are you ready?"

She stammered: "Why, what is it?"

"You will know presently," said the Baron.

The carriage which was waiting, drove up, Madame Adelaide came down from her room in festive attire on Rosalie's arm, who seemed so much impressed by Monsieur Lamare's elegance that the Baron whispered:

"I say, Vicomte, I believe that our maid admires you." The Vicomte blushed to his ears, pretended not to have heard, and taking up the huge bouquet, offered it to Jeanne. She took it, more astonished than ever.

All four got into the carriage and the cook Ludivine, who brought the Baronne a cup of cold broth to sustain her strength, declared: "Truly, Madame, one would say it was a wedding."

They alighted from the carriage as they entered Yport, and as they advanced through the village, the sailors in their new clothes, the creases still showing, left their houses, bowed, shook hands with the Baron, and followed as if it were a procession. The Vicomte had offered Jeanne his arm and walked with her at the head.

When they arrived in front of the church, they stopped, and the great silver cross appeared, held straight by an acolyte preceding another boy in red and white, who carried the holy-water urn in which the sprinkler was dipping.

Then three old choristers passed, one of them limping, then the serpent, then the curé, wearing upon his fat stomach his gold-embroidered stole with its cross. He said good morning with a smile and a nod; then, with his eyes half closed, his lips moving in prayer, his beretta pulled down nearly to his nose, he followed his surpliced bodyguard towards the sea.

On the shore there was a crowd waiting around a new boat, wreathed with flowers. Its mast, sail and rigging were covered with long streamers flapping in the breeze, and the name "Jeanne" appeared on the stern in gold letters.

Old Lastique, master of this boat, built with the Baron's money, advanced to meet the procession. All the men, with one accord, took off their hats; and a row of pious women, clad in large black cloaks falling in great folds from their shoulders, knelt in a circle at the sight of the cross.

The curé, between the two acolytes, stood at one end of the boat, while, at the other end, the three old cantors in their soiled white surplices, with stubby chins, a serious air, and their eyes on their book of chants, sang out of tune at the top of their lungs in the bright morning. Each time they stopped to take breath, the serpent continued its bellowing alone, and as he puffed out his cheeks the musician's little gray eyes disappeared, and the skin of his forehead and neck seemed to distend.

The still and transparent sea appeared to be taking part in the baptism of the boat, hardly moving, with a slight sound as of a rake scratching the shingle, its tiny waves a finger high. And the big

white sea-gulls with widespread wings circled about in the blue heavens, flying off and returning in a curve above the heads of the kneeling crowd, as if they too desired to see what was going on.

But the chanting ceased after an Amen howled for five minutes; and the priest in an unctuous voice murmured some Latin words of which only the sonorous terminations were distinguishable. He next walked round the boat, sprinkling it with holy water, then he began to mutter the *Oremus*, standing alongside the boat opposite the sponsors who stood motionless, hand in hand.

The Vicomte had his usual grave expression on his handsome face, but the young girl, choked by a sudden emotion, faltering, began to tremble so violently that her teeth chattered. The dream that had haunted her for some time had just taken the appearance of a reality, as if in a kind of hallucination. They had spoken of a wedding, a priest was there, surpliced men were chanting prayers; was she not being married? Did her fingers send out an electric shock, did the emotion of her heart run through her veins until it reached the heart of her companion? Did he understand, did he guess — was he, like her, seized with a sort of intoxication of love? Or else, did he know by experience that no woman could resist him?

She suddenly noticed that he was squeezing her hand, gently at first, then tighter and tighter, almost enough to break it. And without moving a muscle of his face, without anybody's perceiving it, he said, yes, he certainly said, and very distinctly: "Oh, Jeanne, if you were willing, this might be our

betrothal!" She bowed her head very slowly, which perhaps signified "Yes." And the priest, who was still sprinkling holy water, scattered several drops upon their fingers.

The ceremony was over. The women rose. The return was a stampede. The cross, in the hands of the acolyte, had lost its dignity; it quickly vanished, oscillating from right to left, or perhaps dipping forward, ready to fall on anyone's nose. The priest, who no longer prayed, was hurrying behind; the cantors and the musician with the serpent had disappeared down a side street the more quickly to doff their vestments, and the sailors hastened away in groups. The same thought, which filled their heads like the smell of a kitchen, lengthened their legs and made their mouths water. A good luncheon awaited them at Les Peuples.

The large table was spread in the courtyard under the apple-trees. Sixty people sat down; sailors and peasants. The Baronne, in the centre, had the two priests at her sides, the one from Yport and the one from the village. The Baron, opposite, was flanked by the mayor and his wife, the latter a thin countrywoman already old, who kept smiling and bowing to all around her. She had a narrow face, squeezed into her big Normandy cap, a veritable hen's head with a white crest and round eyes perpetually astonished. She ate with quick little bites as if she were pecking her plate with her nose.

Jeanne seated beside her sponsor was swimming in happiness. She saw nothing, knew nothing, and remained silent, bewildered with joy.

She asked him: "What is your Christian name?"

"Julien," he replied; "did you not know?"

But she did not reply, thinking: "How often I shall repeat that name!"

When the meal was finished they left the courtyard to the sailors and went to the other side of the château. The Baronne began to take her exercise leaning on the Baron, escorted by the two priests. Jeanne and Julien went to the wood and walked along one of the mossy paths; suddenly he seized her hands:

"Tell me," said he, "will you be my wife?"

She again bowed her head; and as he stammered: "Answer, I beg of you!" she raised her eyes towards him, very gently, and he read his answer there.

IV.

THE Baron came into Jeanne's room one morning before she was up, and sitting down at the foot of the bed, said:

"Monsieur le Vicomte de Lamare has asked us for your hand." She wanted to hide her face under the bed-clothes.

Her father continued: "We have postponed our answer for the present." She gasped, choking with emotion.

At the end of a minute the Baron, who was smiling, added:

"We did not wish to do anything without speaking to you about it. Your mother and I are not opposed to this marriage, but nevertheless we do not want to urge you to it. You are very much richer than he is, but when the happiness of a life is concerned, we should not think too much about money. He has no relations left, so that if you marry him, it would be as if a son came into our family, while with another, it would be you, our daughter, who would go among strangers. The young man pleases us. Do you like him?"

She stammered, blushing to the roots of her hair: "I am willing, papa."

And her father, looking deep into her eyes, and still smiling, murmured: "I thought as much, Mademoiselle."

She remained in a sort of intoxication of emotion until evening, not knowing what she was doing, taking one object for another mechanically, her legs wearied without having walked. Towards six o'clock as she was sitting with her mother under the plane-tree, the Vicomte appeared.

Jeanne's heart began beating wildly. The young man approached without seeming disturbed. When he was very near, he took the Baronne's fingers and kissed them; then raising the trembling hand of the young girl, he gave it a long, tender and grateful kiss.

The radiant period of betrothal began. They talked alone in the corner of the drawing-room, or on the slope at the end of the wood before the stretch of wild land. Sometimes they walked in the Baronne's avenue, he speaking of the future, she with her eyes cast down, looking at the dusty foot-prints of the Baronne.

The thing once decided upon, they wanted to hasten matters. It was therefore agreed that the ceremony should take place in six weeks, on the fifteenth of August; and that the young couple should start at once on their wedding trip. Jeanne, on being consulted about the country she would like to visit, chose Corsica, where they could be more alone than in the Italian cities.

They awaited the moment fixed for their marriage without too great impatience, but wrapped in a delicious tenderness, tasting the exquisite charm of insignificant caresses, of clasped fingers, of passionate glances in which their souls seemed to mingle; and vaguely tormented by the wavering desire for a long embrace.

They decided not to invite anybody to the wedding except Mademoiselle Lison, the Baronne's sister, who lived as a lady boarder in a convent at Versailles. After the death of their father, the Baronne wanted to keep her sister with her; but the old maid, possessed by the idea that she was in everybody's way, that she was useless and troublesome, retired into one of those religious houses which rent apartments to people whose lives are sad and isolated.

She came to spend a month or two with the family from time to time. She was a small woman who spoke little, always retiring, appearing only at meal-time, and going back again to her room, where she remained shut up continually.

She had a placid and aged air, although she was only forty-two, with gentle and sad eyes, and had never counted for anything in the family. When quite little, as she was neither pretty nor naughty she was not much petted, and she stayed in corners, quiet and sweet. She had been neglected ever since. As a young girl nobody noticed her.

She was something like a shadow or a familiar object, a living piece of furniture, which people are accustomed to see every day, but about which they do not trouble themselves.

Her sister, from the habit learned in their home, looked upon her as queer, and quite insignificant. They treated her with an easy familiarity which concealed a sort of good-natured contempt.

She was called Lise, and seemed hurt by this childish and jaunty appellation. When it was clear that she would not marry, they had changed

the name Lise to Lison. At Jeanne's birth she had become Aunt Lison, a poor relation, neat, frightfully timid, even with her sister and her brother-in-law, who, for all that, were fond of her, but with a vague sort of affection, made up of indifference, unconscious compassion, and natural benevolence.

Sometimes, when the Baronne was speaking of the far-off things of her youth, she said, in order to fix the date: "That was at the time of Lison's inconsiderate act."

This was never explained further; and that "inconsiderate act" remained shrouded as in a mist. One evening Lise, then twenty years old, had thrown herself into the water without anyone knowing why. Nothing in her life, in her conduct gave a hint of such folly. She had been fished out half dead, and her parents, raising their indignant hands, instead of seeking the mysterious cause of the deed, had contented themselves with speaking of the "inconsiderate act" as they spoke of the accident to the horse "Coco," which had broken his leg a little before this in a rut and had to be killed.

Since then Lise, afterwards Lison, was considered as of a very weak mind. The gentle contempt which she had inspired in her nearest relatives spread slowly through the hearts of all the persons who surrounded her. Little Jeanne herself, with that natural divination of children, paid no attention to her, never went up to kiss her in her bed, nor entered her room. Good Rosalie, who gave the room all the necessary attentions, seemed the only one to know where it was situated.

When Aunt Lison entered the dining-room for

breakfast, "the child" went, from force of habit, and held up her forehead to be kissed, and that was all. If anyone wanted to speak to her, a servant was sent to look for her; and when she was not there, no one worried about her, no one ever had the notion of being disturbed at her absence and of saying: "Why, I haven't seen Aunt Lison this morning."

She held no stated place; she was one of those beings who live unknown even to their kindred, as unexplored entities, and whose death makes no gap or void in a house — one of those beings who do not know how to enter into the existence, nor into the habits, nor into the love of those who live beside them. When "Aunt Lison" was uttered, these two words aroused, so to speak, no affection in any one's mind. It was as if one had said "the coffee-pot" or "the sugar bowl."

She always walked with quick, silent steps; never made any noise, never ran against anything, seemed to communicate to objects the faculty of making no sound. Her hands seemed to be made of a kind of wadding, she handled everything she touched so lightly and delicately.

Aunt Lison arrived towards the middle of July, quite upset by the idea of this marriage. She brought a lot of presents which, coming from her, were almost unnoticed. On the day after her arrival no one noticed that she was there. But an extraordinary emotion was stirring within her, and she hardly took her eyes off the engaged couple. She busied herself with the wedding outfit with a singular energy, a feverish activity, working like a simple seam-

stress in her room where no one ever came to see her.

Every morning she presented the Baronne with handkerchiefs which she had hemmed herself, with towels on which she had embroidered the crests, asking: "Is that right, Adelaide?" And the Baronne, while carelessly examining the object, would reply: "Don't take so much trouble, my poor Lison." One evening, towards the end of the month, after a day of sultry heat, the moon rose in one of those clear warm nights, which disturb, soften, exalt, and seem to arouse all the secret poetry of our souls.

The soft breath of the fields entered the quiet drawing-room where the Baronne and her husband were languidly playing cards in the round spot of light which the lamp-shade marked upon the table. Aunt Lison, seated beside them, was knitting; and the young people, leaning at the open window, looked out into the moonlit garden. The limes and the plane-trees cast their shadows on the great lawn, which stretched away, pale and gleaming, as far as the dark wood.

Irresistibly drawn by the tender charm of this night, by this misty light in which the trees and shrubs were bathed, Jeanne turned towards her parents and said:

"Father, we are going to take a stroll on the lawn there, in front of the house."

The Baron replied without stopping his playing: "Go, my children," and continued the game.

They went out and began to walk slowly over the moonlit lawn as far as the little wood at the bottom. Time passed without their thinking of returning.

The Baronne, who was tired, wanted to go up to her room. "We must call the lovers," she said. The Baron cast a glance across the big luminous garden where the two shadows were slowly wandering.

"Leave them alone," he said, "it is so lovely outside. Lison will wait for them, won't you, Lison?"

The old maid raised her restless eyes and answered in her timid voice: "Certainly, I will wait for them."

The Baron helped his wife to rise, and, tired himself by the heat of the day, said: "I am going to bed, too." And he departed with the Baronne.

Then Aunt Lison rose in her turn and, placing her unfinished work on the arm of the chair, her wool and her long needle, she went to lean at the window and gazed out at the charming night. The engaged pair walked endlessly across the lawn from the wood to the steps, from the steps to the wood. They held each other's hands without speaking, as if they had gone out of themselves, all mingled with the visible poetry which was exhaled from the earth.

Jeanne suddenly perceived framed in the window the silhouette of the old maid outlined by the light of the lamp behind her. "See," she said, "there is Aunt Lison, looking at us."

The Vicomte raised his head, and, with the indifferent voice of one who speaks without thinking, replied:

"Yes, Aunt Lison is looking at us."

And they continued to dream, to walk slowly, to make love.

But the dew was falling fast, and they shivered a

little from the dampness. "Let us go in," said Jeanne. And they went in.

As they entered the drawing-room, Aunt Lison had begun her knitting again; she had her forehead bent over her work, and her thin fingers trembled a little as if they had been very tired.

Jeanne approached her:

"Aunt, everyone is going to bed now," she said.

The old maid turned away her eyes; they were red as if she had been weeping. The lovers paid no attention to this; but the young man suddenly saw that Jeanne's thin shoes were covered with dew. He was seized with anxiety and tenderly inquired: "Aren't your dear little feet cold?" And suddenly the aunt's fingers were seized with such a trembling that she dropped her work; the ball of yarn rolled away across the floor, and quickly hiding her face in her hands, she began to weep with great convulsive sobs.

The two lovers looked at her in astonishment, without moving. Jeanne quickly fell on her knees, and taking her aunt's hands away from her face, very much upset, asked: "What is the matter, what is the matter, Aunt Lison?"

Then the poor woman, stammering, with her voice full of tears and her body shaking with grief, replied: "It is because he asked you — 'Aren't your dear l-l-l-little f-feet c-c-cold?' No one ever said anything like that to me, never — never —"

Jeanne, surprised, touched with pity, nevertheless felt like laughing at the thought of a lover lavishing tenderness on Aunt Lison; and the Vicomte turned aside in order to conceal his mirth. But the aunt

suddenly rose, left her yarn on the floor and her knitting on the chair, and went without a light up the dark stairway, groping her way to her room.

Left alone, the two young people gazed at each other, amused and softened. Jeanne murmured: "Poor Aunt!" Julien replied: "She must be a little crazy, this evening." They held each other's hands and could not decide to separate, and gently, very gently, they exchanged their first kiss before the empty chair which Aunt Lison had just left.

They gave no thought the next day to the tears of the old maid. The two weeks which preceded the wedding left Jeanne calm and tranquil enough, as if she were worn out with sweet emotions. She had no time for reflection on the morning of the eventful day. She felt only a great sensation of emptiness throughout her whole body, as if her flesh, her blood, her bones, were all melted together under her skin; and she saw, as she touched various objects, that her fingers trembled a good deal.

She did not regain her self-possession until she was in the chancel of the church during the marriage ceremony.

Married! So she was married! All the things, movements, events, that had occurred since day-break seemed to her a dream, a real dream. There are moments in which all about us seems changed; even gestures have a new meaning; there are even hours which do not seem in their ordinary place.

She felt bewildered, above all, astonished. The day before, nothing had been altered in her existence; the constant hope of her life was only becoming a little nearer, almost tangible. She had gone to sleep

a young girl, she was now a married woman. She had crossed this barrier which seemed to conceal the future with its joys, its happiness of which she had dreamed so long. She felt as though a door had opened in front of her; she was about to enter into the "Hoped-For."

The ceremony was ended. They passed into the almost vacant sacristy; for no one had been invited; then they went out. As they appeared at the door of the church a formidable uproar startled the bride, and made the Baronne scream: it was a salvo of guns fired by the peasants. The firing continued until they reached Les Peuples.

A collation was served for the family, for the priest of the manor and the one from Yport, and for the husband and the witnesses selected from among the principal farmers of the neighbourhood. Then a turn was taken in the garden to await dinner. The Baron, the Baronne, Aunt Lison, the mayor, and the Abbé Picot began to stroll through the mother's avenue, while in the opposite avenue the other priest was reading his breviary and walking with long strides. From the other side of the château was heard the gaiety of the peasants, who were drinking cider beneath the apple-trees. All the countryside in its Sunday best thronged the courtyard. The lads and girls chased each other about.

Jeanne and Julien crossed through the copse, climbed the slope, and, both in silence, began to look at the sea. It was a trifle cool, although it was the middle of August; the north wind was blowing and the great sun blazed mercilessly down from the blue sky.

The young people, in order to find shelter, crossed the heath, turning to the right, wishing to reach the undulating and wooded valley which descends towards Yport. As soon as they had gained the coppice no breath of wind touched them, and they left the road to take a narrow path buried in the foliage. There was hardly room for them to walk side by side, and she felt an arm sliding gently about her waist.

She said nothing, her heart quickening, her breath broken. Low branches caressed their heads; they often had to stoop in order to pass. She gathered a leaf; two ladybirds, like two frail little red shells, were hidden beneath it. Then she said, quite innocently, and a little reassured: "Look, a little family."

Julien placed his mouth to her ear and said: "This evening you will be my wife." Although she had learned many things in her sojourn in the country, she had thus far thought only of the poetry of love and was surprised. His wife? Was she not that already?

Then he began to kiss her with little rapid kisses on the temple and on the neck, where the first tresses began to grow. Startled each time by these masculine kisses to which she was not accustomed, she instinctively withdrew her head the other way in order to avoid them, though they delighted her. But they suddenly found themselves at the edge of the wood. She stopped, embarrassed at being so far from home.

"What would people think? Let us return," she said.

He withdrew his arm from her waist, and, both turning, they faced each other, so near that they felt each other's breath upon their faces, and they gazed

at each other. They gazed deep into one another's eyes with that gaze in which two souls seem to blend. They looked into each other's eyes, into that impenetrable "unknown" of each other's being; they sought each other in a silent and prolonged interrogation. What would they be to one another? What would this life be that they were about to begin together? What joys, what happiness, or what disillusionments were they preparing for each other in that long, indissoluble *tête-à-tête* of marriage? And it seemed to them as if they had never yet seen each other.

And suddenly Julien, placing his two hands upon his wife's shoulders, planted full on her mouth a long kiss, such as she had never received. It descended, that kiss, and penetrated her very blood and marrow, giving her such a shock that she wildly pushed Julien away with both arms, almost falling backward as she did so.

"Let us go away from here, let us go away from here," she faltered.

He did not reply, but he took her hands and held them in his own. They did not exchange a word until they reached the house. The rest of the afternoon seemed long.

All gathered at the table at nightfall. The dinner was simple and did not last long, contrary to Norman custom. A sort of embarrassment paralysed the guests. Only the two priests, the mayor, and the four farmers showed a little of that heavy gaiety which generally accompanies weddings. Apparently they had forgotten how to laugh, when a remark of the mayor's woke them up.

It was about nine o'clock; they were about to take coffee. Outside, beneath the apple-trees of the first courtyard, the bal champêtre was beginning. Through the open window they could see the festivity. Lanterns hung on the branches gave the leaves tints of *vert-de-gris*. Rustic dancers swung round, singing a wild air which two violins and a clarinet feebly accompanied, mounted on a large kitchen table used as a platform. The boisterous singing of the peasants at times entirely drowned the sound of the instruments; and the slender sound, torn by the unrestrained voices, seemed to fall from the air in shreds, in little fragments of scattered notes.

Two big casks surrounded by flaming torches furnished drink for the crowd. Two servants did nothing but rinse glasses and bowls in a tub, to hold them, still dripping with water, under the taps from which flowed a stream of red wine or of golden cider. And the dancers, the thirsty dancers, the older ones tranquil, the girls perspiring, crowded around, stretching out their arms to seize in their turn any glass whatever, throwing back their heads, and tossing down their throats the liquid which they preferred.

On a table there were bread, butter, cheese and sausage. Every one took a bite from time to time, and beneath the roof of illuminated leaves, this healthy and boisterous fête gave the bored guests in the dining-room the desire to dance also and to drink from those big barrels, while they munched a slice of bread and butter with a raw onion.

The mayor, who was keeping time with his knife, cried:

"By Jove, that is fun; it is like the wedding of Ganache."

There was a murmur of subdued laughter. But the Abbé Picot, the natural enemy of civil authority, replied: "You mean the marriage at Cana." The other did not accept the correction.

"No, Monsieur le curé, I mean what I say. When I say Ganache, I mean Ganache."

They rose and passed into the drawing-room. Then they mingled a little with the merry crowd, and soon the guests took their leave.

The Baron and Baronne quarrelled in whispers. Madame Adelaide, more breathless than ever, appeared to refuse what her husband asked; finally she said: "No, my dear, I cannot. I would not know how to go about it."

The father, then, abruptly left her, and approached Jeanne: "Will you take a walk with me, my child?" he asked.

She answered, very much moved:

"If you like, papa." They went out.

As soon as they were outside, on the side towards the sea, they felt the sharp wind — one of the cold breezes of summer which already foretell autumn. Clouds were scudding through the sky, now veiling, now revealing the stars. The Baron pressed his daughter's arm against him, tenderly clasping her hand. They walked for a few minutes. He seemed undecided, disturbed. Finally he made up his mind.

"Darling, I am going to perform a difficult task, which really should fall to your mother. But as

she refuses to do it, I must take her place. I am not sure of what you know of the things of life. There are mysteries which are carefully hidden from children, from girls especially, who must be kept pure in mind, irreproachably pure, up to the time when we place them in the arms of the man who is to care for their happiness. It belongs to him to lift that veil thrown over the sweet secret of life. But if no hint has been given to them, they are sometimes shocked by the somewhat brutal reality hidden behind their dreams. Hurt in their soul, hurt even in their body, they refuse their husband that which is accorded to him as an absolute right by both human and natural laws. I cannot tell you more, my darling; but do not forget that you belong wholly to your husband."

What did she know exactly? What did she guess? She began to tremble, she felt low-spirited, overcome by a painful presentiment. They went back into the house. What they saw made them stop at the drawing-room door. Madame Adelaide was sobbing on Julien's shoulder. Her noisy tears, as if blown out by a pair of bellows, seemed to come at the same time from her nose, mouth, and eyes; and the young man, amazed, was awkwardly supporting the huge woman who had thrown herself into his arms to implore him to cherish her beloved, her darling, her adored daughter.

The Baron hastened forward.

"Oh, no scenes, please; no heroics, I beg of you"; and taking his wife, made her sit down in an arm-chair, while she wiped away her tears. He then turned towards Jeanne:

"Now then, my dear, kiss your mother and go to bed."

Ready to cry too, she quickly kissed her parents and fled. Aunt Lison had already retired to her room.

The Baron and his wife were left alone with Julien. All three felt very awkward and could think of nothing to say; the two men in evening dress remained standing, with averted eyes, and Madame Adelaide leant back in her arm-chair still shaken by sobs. The embarrassment becoming unbearable, the Baron began to speak of the trip which the young people were to take in a few days.

Jeanne, in her room, was being undressed by Rosalie who wept like a fountain; her trembling hands could not find hooks or pins, and she seemed assuredly much more moved than her mistress. But Jeanne did not pay any attention to her maid's tears; it seemed to her that she had entered another world, had gone upon another earth, separated from all that she had known and loved. Everything in her life and thoughts seemed turned upside down, even this strange idea came to her: Did she love her husband? He suddenly seemed to her like a stranger whom she hardly knew. Three months before, she did not know that he existed, and now she was his wife. Why was this? Did people plunge into marriage as into a hole open under your feet?

When she was in her night-dress, she slipped into bed; and the cold sheets made her shiver, increasing that sensation of cold, sadness and loneliness which had weighed upon her soul for two hours.

Rosalie went away, still sobbing, and Jeanne waited. She waited, anxious, her heart oppressed, for that certain something, divined and announced in confused terms by her father, that mysterious revelation of the great secret of love.

Without her having heard anyone come up the stairs, there were three soft knocks on her door. She started violently and did not answer. There was another knock, and then the door-handle was turned. She hid her head under the covers as if a thief had entered the room. Footsteps sounded softly upon the floor, and suddenly someone touched her bed. She gave a start and uttered a little cry, and uncovering her head, she saw Julien standing before her, smiling as he looked at her.

"Oh! how you frightened me!" she said.

"Did you not expect me then?" he asked.

She did not reply. He was in evening dress, with his grave, handsome face, and she felt horribly ashamed to be in bed thus before this man, so formally dressed. They did not know what to say, or what to do, not daring even to look at each other, at this serious and decisive hour on which the intimate happiness of their whole lives depended.

He felt vaguely perhaps, what danger this battle offered, and what a supple self-possession and what artful tenderness were necessary, not to offend any of the subtle modesties, the infinite delicacies of a virginal soul nourished on dreams. Then, very gently he took her hand and kissed it, and kneeling at the bedside, as at an altar, he murmured in a voice as light as a breath: "Won't you love me?" She, suddenly reassured, raised her head upon the

pillow among the lace, and smiled. "I love you already, dear."

He put his wife's fine little fingers in his mouth, and, in a voice muffled by the act, he said: "Will you prove to me that you love me?"

She answered, troubled anew, without exactly understanding what she was saying, remembering the words of her father: "I am yours, dear." He covered her wrist with warm kisses, and raising himself slowly, he drew near to her face, which she began to conceal again.

Suddenly throwing one arm forward across the bed, he clasped his wife through the covers, while, slipping his other arm under the pillow, he raised it with her head, and very softly asked: "Then you will make a little place for me beside you?"

She was filled with an instinctive fear, and stammered: "Oh, not yet, please."

He seemed disappointed, a little ruffled, and he rejoined in a tone still suppliant, but a little more brusque: "Why later, since it must be?" She was angry with him for saying that; but, submissive and resigned, she repeated for the second time: "I am yours, dear."

Then he disappeared suddenly into the dressing-room; and she distinctly heard his motions, with the rustling of garments being taken off, a sound of coins in his pocket, the successive falling of his shoes.

And suddenly, in his underwear and socks, he quickly crossed the floor to place his watch on the mantelpiece. Then he returned, running, to the small adjoining room, moved about a little while longer, and Jeanne turned rapidly to the other side,

A WOMAN'S LIFE

shutting her eyes, when she felt that he was coming. She made a movement as if to throw herself on the floor, but there quickly glided against her leg another leg, cold and hairy; and, her face in her hands, bewildered, ready to cry out with fear and terror, she cowered to the back of the bed.

Then he clasped her in his arms, although she turned her back upon him, and he voraciously kissed her neck, the floating laces of her night-cap, and the embroidered collar of her night-dress. She did not move, stiffened with a horrible anxiety, feeling a strong hand seeking for her bosom hidden between her elbows. She gasped, overwhelmed by this brutal touch; and she desired, more than ever, to escape, to run through the house, to shut herself up somewhere far from this man. He no longer stirred. She felt his warmth on her back.

Then her fright was again allayed, and she suddenly thought that she would only have to turn and embrace him.

Finally he seemed to grow impatient, and, in a grieved voice, he said: "Then you won't be my little wife?"

She murmured through her fingers: "Am I not that now?"

He answered with a shade of bad humour: "No, my dear, come, do not make fun of me."

She felt moved by the discontent in his voice, and she suddenly turned towards him to ask his forgiveness. He madly clasped her in his arms, as if starving for her, and he covered with rapid, biting, frantic kisses her whole face and the top of her throat, smothering her with caresses. She had

opened her hands and remained inert under his efforts, no longer knowing what she was doing, or what he was doing, in a bewilderment which prevented her from understanding anything. But she felt a sharp, sudden pain; and she began to groan, twisting in his arms while violently he possessed her.

What happened then? She had little recollection of it for she had lost her head; it seemed to her only that he showered upon her lips a storm of little, grateful kisses. Then he must have spoken to her and she must have answered him. Then he made other attempts, which she resisted with fright, and as she struggled, she felt on his chest that thick hair which she had already felt on his leg, and she recoiled from the shock. Wearied, finally, of solici-ting her without success, he remained motionless upon his back.

Then she began to think. She said to herself, despondent to the bottom of her heart, in the disillusion of an intoxication which she had dreamed to be so different, of a dear expectation destroyed, of a dead bliss: "So this is what he calls being his wife!"

And she remained a long while thus, disconsolate, her glances wandering over the tapestries of the wall, over the ancient legend of love which adorned the room.

But as Julien no longer spoke, no longer moved, she slowly turned her face towards him, and perceived that he was asleep. Asleep, with his mouth partly open and a calm countenance. Asleep! She could not believe it, feeling indignant, more outraged by this sleep than by his brutality, treated like a casual stranger.

Could he sleep on such a night? What had passed between them was, then, nothing unusual to him? Oh! she would rather have been struck, treated violently again, bruised with odious caresses until she had lost consciousness. She remained quiet, leaning on her elbow, bending towards him, listening to the light breath passing between his lips, which at times became something like a snore.

Day dawned dull at first, then clear, then pink, then brilliant. Julien opened his eyes, yawned, stretched his arms, looked at his wife, smiled, and asked: "Did you sleep well, darling?"

She perceived that he used the *tu* now, and replied with the more formal *vous*: "Oh, yes. And you?"

He said: "I, oh! very well." And, turning towards her, kissed her, and then tranquilly began to talk. He developed plans for their life, with notions of economy, and that word, often recurring, astonished Jeanne. She listened to him without fully seizing the meaning of the words, looked at him, and thought of a thousand things which passed over the surface of her mind.

Eight o'clock struck. "Come, we must get up," said he, "we should be ridiculous to stay in bed late," and he rose first. When he had finished dressing, he jauntily assisted his wife in all the small details of her toilette, not permitting Rosalie to be summoned.

As they were going out, he stopped her. "You know," said he, "that we may use the *tu* now, between ourselves. But before your parents we

A WOMAN'S LIFE

had better wait awhile. It will be quite natural when we come back from our wedding journey."

She did not appear except to breakfast. And the day ran on just as ordinarily as if nothing new had happened. There was simply one man the more in the house.

V.

FOUR days later the carriage arrived which was to take them to Marseilles. After the pang of the first night, Jeanne had become accustomed to the contact of Julien, to his kisses, his tender caresses, although her repugnance to their more intimate relations had not decreased. She thought him handsome, she loved him; and again she felt herself happy and gay.

The farewells were brief and without sorrow. The Baronne alone seemed affected; and as the carriage was about to start, she placed a purse, heavy as lead, in her daughter's hand. "It is for your pocket-money as a young wife," she said. Jeanne thrust it into her pocket, and the horses dashed off.

Towards evening Julien said to her: "How much did your mother give you in that purse?" She had thought no more about it, but now she emptied it on her lap. There was a flood of gold, two thousand francs. She clapped her hands: "I will do all sorts of foolish things with it," she said, as she gathered up the money.

After a week's journey, through terrible heat, they reached Marseilles. The next day the "Roi-Louis," a little packet which was going to Naples touching at Ajaccio, took them towards Corsica.

Corsica! the *mâquis*, the bandits! the mountains! the birthplace of Napoleon! It seemed to Jeanne that she had left reality, and was entering, wide awake, into a dream. Side by side on the deck of the ship, they watched the cliffs of Provence glide by. The motionless sea, of a deep azure, as if congealed and hardened in the glowing light of the sun, stretched away under an infinite sky of a lighter, almost exaggerated blue.

"Do you remember our sail in old Lastique's boat?" she said. Instead of answering he gave her a quick kiss on the ear.

The paddles were beating the water, disturbing its heavy slumber; and astern, in a long, foamy trail, a great, faint track where the water frothed like champagne, the straight wake of the boat stretched as far as the eye could reach.

Suddenly, off the bow, only a few fathoms away, an enormous fish, a dolphin, leaped out of the water, plunged back into it headfirst, and disappeared. Jeanne, quite frightened, uttered a cry, and threw herself on Julien's breast. Then she began to laugh at her terror, and watched attentively to see if the fish would not reappear. In a few seconds it leaped again, like a great mechanical toy. Then it fell back and sprang again; then there were two, then three, then six, which seemed to gambol around the heavy boat, as an escort to their huge brother, the wooden fish with the iron fins. They passed to the left, returned on the right of the ship, and now all together, now in succession, as in play, or in a gay pursuit, they threw themselves into the air with leaps

which described a curve, and then dived back, one after the other.

Jeanne clapped her hands, jumping for joy, delighted at each appearance of these huge and supple swimmers. Her heart bounded with them in a mad and childish pleasure. Suddenly they disappeared. Once or twice they were seen very far off toward the open sea; then they vanished, and Jeanne felt, for a few seconds, sorry at the departure.

Evening came, a calm, radiant evening, full of light, of happy peacefulness. Not a movement in the air or on the water, and the illimitable repose of the ocean and of the sky communicated itself to their drowsy souls in which likewise no emotion stirred.

The great sun sank softly beneath the horizon, towards invisible Africa, Africa, the burning land whose ardours they already seemed to feel; but a sort of cool caress, which yet was not a breeze, lightly touched their faces when the orb had disappeared.

They did not wish to seek their stateroom, where there were all the horrible odours of a steamer; so they both stretched themselves on the deck, side by side, wrapped in their cloaks. Julien went to sleep at once; but Jeanne remained with her eyes open, agitated by the novelty of the journey. The monotonous sound of the wheels lulled her; and she looked above her at the legions of stars, so bright with a sharp light, scintillating and, as it were, moist in the pure sky of the south.

Towards morning, nevertheless, she slumbered. Noises and voices awoke her. The sailors, with

their song, were cleaning up the ship. She shook her husband, who was motionless in sleep, and they rose. She drank in with exultation the savour of the salt mist, which penetrated her to the very tips of her fingers. The sea was everywhere. Nevertheless, off the bow, something gray, confused still in the growing dawn, a sort of accumulation of strange, pointed, jagged clouds, seemed to float on the waves. Then it appeared more distinct; the forms were more sharply outlined on the brightening sky; a long line of angular and fantastic mountains rose: it was Corsica, enveloped in a sort of light veil.

The sun rose behind, outlining all the projections of the peaks in black shadows; then all the summits were illumined while the rest of the island remained enshrouded in vapour.

The captain, a little dried-up, sunburned, short, shrivelled man, shrunk by the harsh salt winds, appeared upon the deck, and in a voice hoarse with thirty years of command, worn by orders shouted in storms, said to Jeanne: "Do you smell it?"

There was, in fact, a strange and peculiar odour of plants and wild shrubs. The captain resumed:

"It is Corsica which smells like that, Madame; it is her own pretty woman's odour. After twenty years' absence I would recognise it five miles away. I come from there. The great man far away at St. Helena is always speaking, they say, of the odour of his native country. He is of my family." And the captain, raising his hat, saluted Corsica, saluting at the same time, across the ocean, the great imprisoned Emperor, who was of his family. Jeanne was so touched that she almost wept.

Then the sailor stretched his arm toward the horizon: "Les Sanguinaires!" he said. Julien, standing near his wife, held her by the waist, and they both looked far off to discover the indicated point. They finally descried some pyramid-shaped rocks, which the vessel soon rounded in order to enter an immense and tranquil gulf, surrounded by a number of lofty peaks whose lower slopes seemed covered with moss.

The captain pointed out this verdure: "That is the *mâquis*," said he. Accordingly as they advanced, the circle of mountains seemed to close in behind the ship, which slowly sailed in an azure lake so transparent that they could at times see the bottom. Suddenly the city appeared, all white, at the end of the gulf, beside the billows, at the foot of the mountains.

Some little Italian boats were anchored in the harbour. Four or five lighters came prowling about the "Roi-Louis" to seek passengers for the shore. Julien, who was collecting their luggage, asked his wife in a low tone: "It is enough to give the steward twenty sous, isn't it?" For a week he had been asking that same question, and every time it annoyed her. She answered with a little impatience. "When a person is not sure of giving enough, he gives too much."

He continually disputed with the managers and waiters of the hotel, with coachmen, with the sellers of no matter what, and when, by force of quibbling, he had obtained a slight reduction, he said to Jeanne, rubbing his hands: "I don't like to be robbed."

She trembled when bills were presented, sure in

advance of the remarks which he would make on each item, humiliated by this haggling, blushing to the roots of her hair under the contemptuous look of the servants who followed her husband with their glances while holding his insufficient tip in the palms of their hands. He had a discussion with the boatman who put them ashore.

The first tree which she saw was a palm! They went to a great empty hotel, at the corner of a big square, and had lunch. When they had finished dessert, just as Jeanne was rising to go for a stroll through the city, Julien, taking her in his arms, murmured tenderly in her ear: "Suppose we lie down a little while, sweetheart?"

She was taken by surprise: "Go to bed? But I am not tired."

He embraced her. "I need you. Do you understand? It's two days —!"

She grew purple, abashed, and stammered: "Oh! Now? But what will people think? How can you ask for a bedroom in full daylight? Oh! Julien, I beg of you."

But he interrupted her: "I don't care what the hotel people may say and think. You will see how little that bothers me." And he rang the bell. She said no more, her eyes downcast, revolted, nevertheless, in her soul and in her flesh, by this incessant desire of her husband, obeying only with disgust, resigned but humiliated, seeing in this something bestial, degrading, in fine, an obscenity. Her senses were still sleeping, and her husband treated her now as if she shared his ardours.

When the waiter arrived, Julien asked him to

show them to their room. The man, a true Corsican, hairy to his eyes, did not understand, saying that the apartment would be prepared for the night. Julien impatiently explained: "No, now, at once. We are tired from travelling and we want to rest."

Then a surreptitious grin appeared on his face, and Jeanne felt she would like to run away. When they came downstairs again, an hour later, she dared no longer pass in front of the people whom she met, persuaded that they would laugh and whisper behind her back. She was angry at heart with Julien for not understanding this, for not having these little modesties, these delicacies of instinct; and she felt a barrier, a curtain between them, perceiving for the first time that two persons never penetrate to each other's soul, each other's mind, and that, entwined at times but not mingled, they go through life side by side, the moral being of each one of us remaining eternally alone through life.

They stayed for three days in this little town hidden in its blue gulf, as warm as a furnace behind its screen of mountains, which never allow the winds to strike it. Then an itinerary was arranged for their trip, and in order not to be turned back by any difficult road, they decided to hire their horses. They engaged, therefore, two small Corsican stallions with wild eyes, thin and tireless, and set out one morning at daybreak. A guide, mounted on a mule, accompanied them and carried the provisions, for inns are unknown in that wild country.

The road at first followed the gulf, but plunged later into a shallow valley going towards the great

peaks. Often they crossed torrents which were almost dry: an appearance of a stream still flowed beneath the stones, like a slinking animal, and made a timid gurgle.

The uncultivated country seemed all naked. The hillsides were covered with tall grass, yellow at this hot season. At times they met a mountaineer, either on foot, or on a small horse, or astride a donkey about the size of a dog. All carried loaded guns on their shoulders — old, rusty weapons, but formidable in their hands.

The sharp perfume of the aromatic plants with which the island is covered seemed to thicken the air; and the road kept gently ascending amidst the long folds of the mountains. The summits of pink or blue granite gave tints of fairyland to the vast landscape; and on the lower slopes forests of huge chestnut-trees looked like green bushes, so gigantic are the undulations of the earth in this country.

Sometimes the guide, pointing towards the steep heights, would mention a name. Jeanne and Julien looked, saw nothing, then finally discovered something gray, like a mass of rock fallen from the summit. It was a village, a little hamlet, hanging there, clinging like a bird's nest, almost invisible on the immense mountain.

This long journey at a slow pace wearied Jeanne. "Let us canter a little," said she. And she urged her horse. Then, as she did not hear her husband galloping near her, she turned around, and began to laugh heartily at seeing him careering along, pale, holding his horse's mane, and bounding up and

down most strangely. His beauty, his face, typical of a "handsome cavalier," made his awkwardness and his fear even more ridiculous. They then began to trot gently.

The road now stretched between two interminable coppices which covered the whole of the slopes like a mantle. This was the *mâquis*, the impenetrable *mâquis*, formed of green oaks, junipers, arbutus, mastic, alatern, heather, laurel, thyme, myrtle, and box, mingling like tresses with entwining clematis, monstrous ferns, honeysuckles, laburnum, rosemary, lavender, and briars, covering the sides of the mountains with a tangled fleece.

They were hungry. The guide rejoined them and conducted them to one of those charming springs so frequent in mountainous countries, a slender thread of water coming from a hole in the rock and flowing in a tiny canal formed by a chestnut-leaf placed there by some passer-by to lead the slight current to the mouth. Jeanne felt so happy that she could hardly restrain herself from uttering cries of joy. They started again, and began to descend, passing round the Gulf of Sagone.

Towards evening they went through Cargese, the Greek village, founded in former times by a colony of fugitives driven from their native land. Tall and lovely girls, with straight backs, long hands, slender figures, singularly graceful, formed a group about a fountain. Julien having greeted them with a "Good evening," they replied in a musical voice in the harmonious language of their abandoned country.

Arriving at Piana, they had to ask for hospitality, as in ancient times and lost regions. Jeanne shiv-

ered with pleasure while waiting for the door, at which Julien had knocked, to be opened. Oh! this was indeed travelling! With all the unforeseen happenings of unexplored ways. They applied, it so happened, to a young married couple, and were received as the Patriarchs might have received guests sent by God. They slept on a corn mattress, in an old worm-eaten house. All its woodwork was punctured with holes, and threaded by long borer worms which are devourers of wood. It rustled, seeming to live and breathe.

They departed at sunrise, but soon halted in front of a forest, a true forest of purple granite. It was one of those peaks, columns, or towers, a startling shape modelled by time, the wind, and sea-mist.

Three hundred metres high, slender, round, twisted, crooked, misshapen, unexpected, fantastic, these surprising rocks appeared to be trees, plants, animals, monuments, men, robed monks, horned devils, huge birds, a collection of monstrosities, a nightmare procession, petrified by the fiat of some whimsical god. Jeanne no longer spoke; her heart was oppressed, and she took Julien's hand, clasping it tightly, overwhelmed with the need of loving, before all this natural beauty.

Suddenly rising out of this chaos, they discovered a new gulf entirely girdled with a blood-coloured wall of red granite. These scarlet rocks were reflected in the blue water. Jeanne stammered: "Oh! Julien!" not being able to find other words, softened with admiration, her throat choking; and two tears fell from her eyes. He looked at her astonished, and asked: "What's the matter, pet?"

She wiped her cheeks, smiled, and in a slightly trembling voice, she said: "It is nothing — I am nervous — I don't know — I was affected. I am so happy that the least thing moves my heart."

He did not understand these womanly weaknesses, the shocks felt by these sensitive beings, perturbed by a mere nothing, whom an enthusiasm will move like a catastrophe, whom an impalpable sensation revolutionises, maddens with joy, or plunges into despair. These tears seemed ridiculous to him, and entirely preoccupied with the dangerous road, he said: "You would do better to watch your horse."

By an almost impassable road they descended to the bottom of this gulf, then turned to the right to climb the sombre valley of Ota. But the path proved horrible. Julien proposed trying it on foot. She asked nothing better, delighted to walk and to be alone with him after her recent emotion.

The guide went ahead with the mule and the horses, and they walked on slowly. The mountain opened, cleft from top to bottom. The path buried itself in this breach. It followed the bottom, between two prodigious walls; and a great torrent ran through this crevasse. The air was chill, the granite seemed black, and, far above, one was astonished and bewildered to see a little of the blue sky. A sudden sound made Jeanne start. She raised her eyes: an enormous bird flew from a hole, it was an eagle. Its opened wings seemed to seek the two sides of the shaft and it mounted into the azure and disappeared.

Further on, the crack in the mountain divided: the path climbed between the two ravines in zigzags.

Jeanne, light and sportive, went first, making the pebbles roll under her feet, intrepid, leaning over abysses. He followed her, a little out of breath, keeping his eyes on the ground for fear of a vertigo.

Suddenly the sun inundated them: they felt as if they had just come out of hell. They were thirsty, a damp trail guided them through a chaos of rocks to a tiny little spring running through a hollow stick put there for the use of the goatherds. A carpet of moss covered the soil round about. Jeanne kneeled to drink, and Julien did the same.

As she was enjoying the coolness of the water, he took her waist and tried to steal her place at the end of the little wooden conduit. She resisted: their lips touched, met, and parted. In the struggle, they seized in turn the slender end of the tube and bit it in order not to let it go. And the thread of cold water, taken and left continually, broke and renewed itself, splashed their faces, necks, clothes, and hands. Little drops like pearls glistened in their hair. And kisses flowed with the stream.

Suddenly love suggested an idea to Jeanne. She filled her mouth with the clear liquid, and, her cheeks swollen like water bottles, made Julien understand that she wanted to give him a drink from her lips. He held his mouth forward, smiling, his head thrown back, his arms open; and he drank a draught from this fountain of living flesh which filled him with a wild desire. Jeanne leaned upon him with an unwonted tenderness; her heart palpitated, her breasts heaved, her eyes seemed softened, moist

with water. She murmured softly: "Julien — I — I love you," and drawing him to her, she lay back and hid her blushing face in her hands. He fell upon her, and embraced her passionately. Her breath was coming in gasps of nervous expectation, and suddenly she gave a cry, thrilled by the lightning stroke of the sensation she craved.

They were a long time in reaching the top of the mountain, she was so breathless and overpowered with lassitude, and it was evening when they reached Evisa and found the house of a relative of their guide, Paoli Palabretti. He was a man of tall figure, a little bent, with the melancholy air of a consumptive. He conducted them to their room, a gloomy room with walls of naked stone, but handsome for a country where all elegance is unknown, and he expressed, in his Corsican dialect — a mixture of French and Italian — his pleasure at receiving them. A clear voice interrupted him, and a small dark woman, with big black eyes warmed by the sun, with a slender form, her teeth showing from her habit of laughing continually, rushed forward, kissed Jeanne, shook Julien's hand and said: "Good day, Madame; good day, Monsieur; are you well?"

She removed the hats and shawls, doing everything with one arm, for she carried the other in a sling, then she drove everybody out, saying to her husband:

"Take them for a stroll till dinner."

Monsieur Palabretti immediately obeyed, placed himself between the two young people and took them to see the village. He dragged his steps and his

words, coughing frequently and repeating every five minutes: "It is the cold air of Val which has affected my lungs."

He guided them by a hidden path under enormous chestnut-trees. Suddenly he stopped, and, with a monotonous accent, said: "It was here that my cousin, Jean Rinaldi, was killed by Mathieu Lori. I was there, quite near Jean, when Mathieu appeared at ten paces from us. 'Jean', he cried, 'don't go to Albertacce; don't go there, Jean, or I will kill you, I tell you.' I took Jean's arm, and said: 'Don't go there, Jean, he'll do it.' It was on account of a girl whom both were after, Paulina Sinacoupi. But Jean replied: 'I'll go, Mathieu; you can't prevent me.' Then Mathieu lowered his gun, before I could aim mine, and fired. Jean gave a great leap with both feet, like children skipping rope, yes, Monsieur, and fell full length upon me, so that my gun fell from my grasp and rolled as far as that chestnut there. Jean opened his mouth wide but did not speak a word, he was dead."

The young people, stupefied, looked at the tranquil witness of this crime. Jeanne asked: "And the assassin?"

Paoli Palabretti had a long fit of coughing, then he continued: "He reached the mountains. My brother killed him, the next year. You know my brother, Philippi Palabretti, the bandit."

Jeanne shivered: "Your brother a bandit?"

The placid Corsican had a gleam of pride in his eyes. "Yes, Madame, he was a celebrity, he was. He laid low six gendarmes. He was killed with Nicolas Morali, when they were surrounded in Niolo,

after a six days' battle, and when they were almost dying with hunger."

Then he added with a resigned air: "It is the way of the country," in the same tone in which he said: "The air of Val is cold." Then they returned for dinner, and the little Corsican woman treated them as if she had known them for twenty years.

But an uneasiness haunted Jeanne. Would she again find in the arms of Julien that strange and impetuous shock of the senses which she had felt on the moss at the fountain? When they were alone in their room she trembled lest she should be still insensible under his kisses. But she was quickly reassured: it was her first night of love.

The next morning, at the hour of starting, she did not like to leave this humble house in which it seemed to her that a new happiness had begun for her. She drew her host's little wife into her room, and while asserting that she would not ask her to accept a present, she insisted that she must be permitted, after her return, to send her from Paris some souvenir, to which she attached an almost superstitious idea.

The young Corsican woman resisted a long while, not wanting to accept anything. Finally she consented: "Well," said she, "you may send me a small pistol, quite a small one."

Jeanne opened her eyes wide. The other added in a low tone, almost in her ear, as a person confides a sweet and intimate secret: "It is to kill my brother-in-law." And smiling she quickly unrolled the bandages which enveloped her unused arm, and showed her round white flesh, pierced quite through

with a stiletto, the wound having almost healed, leaving a scar.

"If I had not been as strong as he, he would have killed me. My husband is not jealous, he knows me; and then he is ill, you know, and that calms his blood. Besides, I am an honest woman, Madame; but my brother-in-law believes everything that anyone tells him. He is jealous for my husband, and he will certainly make another attempt. Then if I had the pistol, I should be tranquil, and sure of avenging myself."

Jeanne promised to send her the weapon, kissed her new friend tenderly and continued her journey. The rest of the trip was only a dream, endless embraces and intoxicating kisses. She saw nothing, neither the landscapes, nor the places where she stopped. She saw nothing but Julien.

Then began the childish and charming play of love, the silly, delightful words of affection, the giving of tender names to all the curves and contours of their bodies where their kisses lingered. As Jeanne slept on her right side, her left breast was often exposed in the morning when she awoke. When Julien noticed this, he called that breast "Mr. Flirt," and the other "Mr. Faithful," because its rosy tip seemed more sensitive to his kisses. The passage between the two was known as "Mother's walk," because he constantly lingered there, and another more secret place was called "the road to Damascus," in memory of the Ota valley.

On arrival at Bastia, the guide had to be paid. Julien rummaged in his pockets. Finding nothing,

he said to Jeanne: "As you are not using your mother's two thousand francs, give them to me to carry for you. They will be safer in my belt; and it will prevent my having to make change." And she handed him the purse.

They reached Leghorn, visited Florence, Genoa, and all the Corniche district. One morning, when the mistral was blowing, they arrived back at Marseilles. Two months had flown since their departure from Les Peuples. It was now the fifteenth of October. Jeanne, affected by the cold wind which seemed to come from far-off Normandy, felt sad. Julien had for some time seemed changed, tired, indifferent: and she was afraid without knowing of what she was afraid.

She delayed their homeward journey four days more, not being able to make up her mind to leave this country of the sun. It seemed to her that she had just reached the acme of happiness.

Finally they started. They were to make in Paris all the purchases for their definite installation at Les Peuples; and Jeanne was anticipating delight at taking home marvels, thanks to her mother's gift; but the first thing of which she thought was the pistol promised to the young Corsican woman of Evisa.

The day after their arrival she said to Julien: "My dear, will you please give me back mamma's money because I want to make some purchases."

He turned towards her with a displeased expression of face: "How much do you need?"

She was surprised and stammered: "Why, as much as you like."

He replied: "I am going to give you one hundred francs; be careful not to waste it."

She did not know what to say, abashed and confused. Finally she hesitatingly said: "But I gave you that money to—"

He did not let her finish: "Yes, certainly. Whether it be in your pocket or in mine makes no difference, now that we have the same purse. I don't refuse it to you, do I, since I am giving you a hundred francs?"

She took the five twenty-franc pieces without adding a word; but she dared not ask for more, and bought nothing but the pistol.

A week later they started for Les Peuples.

VI.

IN front of the white fence with brick pillars the family and the servants stood waiting. The post carriage stopped, and there were long embraces. The Baronne wept. Jeanne, affected, wiped away her tears; her father walked up and down nervously. Then, while the luggage was removed, the journey was described before the drawing-room fire. Words flowed abundantly from Jeanne's lips; and all was told in half an hour, except, perhaps, some little details, forgotten in this rapid recital.

Then the young woman went to open her parcels. Rosalie, deeply affected herself, assisted her. When this was finished, when the linen, the dresses, the toilette articles had been put in place, the little maid left her mistress; and Jeanne, a trifle tired, sat down. She wondered what she should do now, seeking an occupation for her mind, an employment for her hands. She had no desire to go down to the drawing-room with her mother who was dozing; and she thought of a walk; but the country seemed so dull that simply from looking at it through the window she felt a weight of melancholy.

Then she realised that she had nothing to do, that she would never again have anything to do. All her youth in the convent had been preoccupied

with the future, busy with dreams. The continual agitation of her hopes filled, at that time, her hours without her feeling them pass. Then hardly had she left those austere walls where her illusions had bloomed, when her expectation of love was immediately realized. The man whom she had hoped for, met, loved, and married in a few weeks, as people marry on these sudden resolves, took her to his arms without permitting her to reflect upon anything.

But now the sweet reality of the first days had become the daily reality, which closed the doors to the undefined hopes, to the charming disquietudes of love. Yes, waiting was finished. There was nothing more to do, neither to-day nor to-morrow nor ever. She felt all that vaguely, with disillusion, with a sinking of her dreams. She rose and pressed her forehead to the cold window-pane. Then, after looking for some time at the sky where sombre clouds were rolling, she decided to go out.

Were they the same fields, the same grass, the same trees as in the month of May? What had become of the sunny gaiety of the leaves and the green poetry of the lawn where the dandelions flamed, or the poppies bled, or the daisies blossomed, or the fantastic yellow butterflies hovered as if at the end of invisible strings? And that intoxication of the air charged with life, with aromas, and with fecundating atoms, existed no longer.

The avenues, washed by the continual down-pours of autumn, stretched away, covered with a thick carpet of dead leaves, beneath the shivering thinness of the almost naked poplars. The slender

branches trembled in the wind, still stirring some slight foliage ready to drop into space. And continually, all day long, like an incessant rain sad enough to make one weep, these last leaves, all yellow now, like big golden sous, became detached, turned, whirled, and fell.

She went as far as the grove. It was as sorrowful as the room of a dying man. The green wall which separated and hid the pretty walks was scattered. The entangled shrubs, like a lace-work of fine wood, struck their thin branches against each other; and the murmur of fallen and dried leaves, which the breeze stirred, moved, and piled up in heaps, seemed the last sigh of dying agony. Some little birds hopped from place to place looking for a shelter.

Protected, nevertheless, by the thick curtain of elms, placed as an advance guard against the sea winds, the lime and the plane-tree, still covered with their summer attire, seemed clad, one in red velvet and the other in orange silk, tinted thus by the first cold days according to the nature of their sap.

Jeanne walked up and down the Baronne's avenue with slow steps, along the line of the Couillard farm. Something weighed upon her, like a presentiment of the long weariness of the monotonous life which was beginning for her.

Then she seated herself on the slope where Julien had for the first time spoken to her of love; and she remained there, musing, almost without thinking, with a pining heart, with a longing to go to sleep in order to forget the sadness of this day.

Suddenly she perceived a sea-gull, soaring through the sky, borne upon the breeze; and she called to mind that eagle, which she had seen, there in Corsica, in the gloomy vale of Ota. She felt in her heart the sharp shock which is given by the memory of something sweet but forever finished; and she suddenly seemed to see the radiant island with its wild, perfume, its sun which ripened the oranges and the citrons, its pink-topped mountains, its azure gulfs and its ravines where torrents rushed.

Then the damp and harsh landscape which surrounded her, with the dismal falling of the leaves and the gray clouds driven before the wind, enveloped her in such a depth of desolation that she went back into the house in order to avoid sobbing outright.

Her mother, torpid before the fireplace, was napping, accustomed to the melancholy of the days, and not feeling it any longer. The Baron and Julien had gone for a walk that they might talk over their affairs. And night came, casting a gloomy shadow through the vast drawing-room, which was lighted by the flickering reflections of the fire. Outside, through the windows, a remnant of daylight still made visible the unkempt landscape of the season, and the grayish sky looked as if it had been rubbed in mud.

The Baron soon appeared, followed by Julien. When he entered the darkened room, he rang, crying: "Quick, quick, some lights! It is gloomy here." And he sat down in front of the fireplace. While his damp feet smoked near the coals, and the mud, dried by the heat, fell from the soles of his boots, he rubbed his hand gaily. "I believe," he said, "that

it is going to freeze; the sky is lighting to the north; there is a full moon this evening, and the frost will bite hard to-night."

Then turning towards his daughter, he said: "Well, child, are you contented to be back in your own country, your own house, with the old folk?"

This simple question upset Jeanne. She threw herself into her father's arms, her eyes filled with tears, and kissed him nervously, as if to ask his pardon; for, in spite of the efforts of her heart to be gay, she felt overwhelmed with sadness. She thought of all the joy which she had promised herself on returning to her parents; and she was astonished at this coldness which paralysed her tenderness. She felt like one who has thought a good deal, while far away, of people beloved — people mixed up with one's daily life — and who feels, upon finding them again, a sort of check on the affections until such time as the bonds of the former common life are renewed.

The dinner was long; there was little conversation. Julien seemed to have forgotten his wife. In the drawing-room, afterwards, she let herself doze by the fire opposite the Baronne, who slept outright. Jeanne, awakened a moment later by the voices of the two men who were engaged in a discussion, wondered, as she tried to rouse her energies, if she also were going to be seized by the dull lethargy of habits which nothing interrupts.

The flames of the fireplace, soft and reddish through the day, became lively, bright, and crackling. They threw sudden gleams on the faded chair-covers, on the fox and the stork, on the melancholy heron, on the grasshopper and the ant.

The Baron drew near, smiling and holding his open hands to the live brands: "Ah, ah! the fire is burning well, this evening. It is freezing, my children." Then he placed his hands on Jeanne's shoulder, and said, pointing at the fire: "You see, daughter, this is the best thing in the world; the home hearth, the hearth with one's own gathered round. Nothing equals that. But it is bedtime; you ought to be very tired, children."

When Jeanne had gone up to her room, she wondered how two returnings to the same place, which she thought she loved, could be so different. Why did she feel as if bruised? Why should this house, this dear country, all that which up to the present time made her heart thrill, seem to-day so heartbreaking?

But her glance suddenly fell on the clock. The little bee still swung from left to right, and from right to left, with the same rapid and continuous motion, above the vermilion flowers. Suddenly Jeanne felt an impulse of affection, moved even to tears before this little machine which seemed alive, which sang to her the hour and palpitated like a heart. She certainly had not been so moved in kissing her father and mother. The heart has mysteries which no reasoning can penetrate.

For the first time since her marriage she was alone in bed, Julien, under the pretext of fatigue, having taken another bedroom. It had been arranged, for that matter, that each should have his or her own. She was a long time getting to sleep, astonished at no longer feeling anyone at her side, unaccustomed to sleeping alone and annoyed by the harsh north wind which beat against the roof. She was awakened

in the morning by a great light which bathed the foot of her bed. The window-panes, thick with frost, were reddened as if the whole horizon were on fire.

Wrapping herself in a large dressing-gown, she ran to the window and opened it. An icy breeze, healthful and sharp, made her skin tingle with a piercing cold which brought the tears to her eyes; and in the midst of a purple sky a great sun appeared behind the trees, shining and puffed like the face of a drunken man. The earth, covered with white frost, hard and dry now, creaked beneath the tread of the farm people. In that single night, all the unstripped branches of the poplar trees had been denuded; and beyond the waste land appeared the great, greenish line of the waves all strewn with white trails.

The plane-tree and the lime were quickly stripped by the blasts. At each passing of the icy wind the clouds of leaves detached by the sudden frost were scattered in the air like a flight of birds. Jeanne dressed herself, went out, and, for something to do, started to see the farmers.

The Martins welcomed the mistress of the house, and kissed her on both cheeks; then they urged her to drink a little glass of cordial, and then she went to the other farm. The Couillards opened their arms to her; the mistress of the house pecked her on the ears, and she had to drink a little glass of black currant wine. After this she went back to breakfast.

The day passed like the preceding one, cold instead of damp. And the other days of the week resembled these two; and all the weeks of the month

resembled the first week. Little by little, however, her longing for far-off countries grew weaker. Habit placed a coating of resignation over her life like the chalky deposit which limestone springs leave upon objects. And a certain interest in the thousand insignificant things of daily existence, a care for the simple and trifling regular occupations, sprang up again in her heart.

There developed in her a species of meditative melancholy, a vague disenchantment with life. What did she require? What did she desire? She knew not. No social ambition possessed her: no thirst for pleasures, no inclination even towards possible joys; what were they, for that matter? Just as the old arm-chairs of the drawing-room faded in time, everything gradually lost its colour in her eyes, everything lost its ancient character, or took on a pale and dull hue.

Her relations with Julien had completely changed. He seemed quite another person since the return from their wedding journey, like an actor who has played his part and reassumes his ordinary character. He hardly noticed her, or even spoke to her; all trace of love had suddenly disappeared, and the nights were few when he entered her room.

He had taken charge of the fortune and of the house, altered the leases, harassed the peasants, curtailed the expenses, and, having put on the bearing of a gentleman farmer, had lost the polish and the elegance of the betrothed young man. He never discarded an old velvet hunting-coat adorned with brass buttons, which he had found in his wardrobe, although it was stained with spots; and influenced by

the negligence of those who have no longer the desire to please, he had ceased to shave himself, so that his long badly-trimmed beard disfigured him incredibly. His hands were no longer cared for; and after each meal he drank four or five glasses of brandy.

Jeanne having tried tender reproaches, he had answered her so shortly: "Let me alone, won't you?" that she did not venture any more advice. She had resigned herself to these changes in a way which astonished herself. He had become a stranger to her, a stranger whose soul and heart were closed to her. She often thought about it, wondering how it was that after having thus met, loved, and married in a glow of tenderness, they should suddenly find themselves almost as unknown to each other as if they had never slept side by side.

And how was it that she did not suffer more from his abandonment? Was life like this? Had they deceived themselves? Was there nothing more for her in the future? If Julien had remained handsome, well-groomed, and seductive as of old, would she perhaps have suffered much more?

It was decided that, after New Year, the newly married couple should be left to themselves, that her father and mother would go to their house in Rouen for a few months. The young people were to spend the winter at Les Peuples so as to become familiar with the surroundings in which they would have to spend their whole life. Besides, they had neighbours, the Brisevilles, the Couteliers, and the Fourvilles, to whom Julien was to introduce his wife. They could not visit them, as they had not yet been

able to get the painter to come and change the coat of arms on the family carriage. The old carriage had been ceded by the Baron to his son-in-law and under no consideration would Julien go out in it until the arms of the de Lamares had been quartered with those of the Perthuis des Vauds.

Now there was only one man in the whole province who made a specialty of coats-of-arms, a painter from Bolbec, named Bataille, who was naturally in great request among all the Normandy aristocracy; so Julien had to wait for some time before he could secure his services.

At last, one December morning just as they were finishing lunch at Les Peuples, they saw a man, with a box on his back, open the gate and come up the path; it was Bataille. He was shown into the dining-room, and lunch was served to him just as if he had been a gentleman, for his constant intercourse with the provincial aristocracy, his knowledge of the coats of arms, their mottoes and signification, made him a sort of herald with whom no gentleman need be ashamed to shake hands.

Pencils and paper were brought, and while Bataille ate his lunch, the Baron and Julien made sketches of their escutcheons with all the quarters. The Baronne, always delighted when anything of this sort was discussed, gave her advice, and even Jeanne took part in the conversation, as if it aroused some interest in her. Bataille, without interrupting his lunch, occasionally gave an opinion, took the pencil to make a sketch of his idea, quoted examples, described all the aristocratic carriages in Normandy, and seemed to scatter an atmosphere of nobility all around him. He was a

little man with thin gray hair and paint-daubed hands which smelt of oil. It was said that he had once committed a grave offence against public morality, but the esteem in which he was held by all the titled families had long ago effaced this stain on his character.

As soon as the painter had finished his coffee he was taken to the coach-house and the carriage was uncovered. Bataille looked at it, gave an idea of the size he thought the shield ought to be, and then, after the others had again given their opinions, he began his work. In spite of the cold the Baronne ordered a chair and a foot-warmer to be brought out for her that she might sit and watch the painter. Soon she began to talk to him, asking him about the marriages and births and deaths of which she had not yet heard, and adding these fresh details to the genealogical trees which she already knew by heart. Beside her, astride a chair, sat Julien, smoking a pipe and occasionally spitting on the ground as he watched the painting of his rank.

Old Simon passed on his way to the garden, and he too stopped in to examine the work. The arrival of Bataille having been noised about the two farms, the good wives soon made their appearance and standing on each side of the Baronne, they went into raptures, saying: "It does take a clever man to arrange a thing like that!"

The escutcheons on the two doors could not be completed until about eleven o'clock the next morning. Everybody was present and the carriage was brought outside so that the effect might be better judged. It was perfect. Bataille was complimented

and went on his way again, with his box on his back. The Baron, his wife, Jeanne, and Julien all agreed that Bataille was a clever man, and might have become a great artist, if circumstances had been favourable.

By way of economy Julien had effected changes which necessitated certain modifications. The old coachman had become the gardener; Julien having decided to drive himself. He had sold the carriage horses so as not to be obliged to feed them. As some one was needed for the stable, he had made a groom out of Marius, the little cowkeeper. Then, in order to procure horses, he introduced a clause in the lease of the Couillards and Martins, compelling each of them to furnish him with a horse on a certain day of the month designated by him, and in return he exempted them from their tribute of poultry.

The Couillards having bought a great, yellow-haired nag, and the Martins a small white, long-haired animal; the two horses were harnessed, and Marius, buried in an old livery of Simon's, brought the carriage round to the door. Julien, who was spruce, and in tight-fitting clothes, would have looked a little like his old, elegant self, if his long beard had not made him look common. He inspected the horses, the carriage, and the little groom, and thought they looked very well, the only thing of any importance in his eyes being the new coat of arms. The Baronne came downstairs on her husband's arm, got in, and had some cushions put behind her back; then came Jeanne. She laughed first at the strange pair of horses. The white one, she said, was the grandson of the yellow. Her laughter increased

when she saw Marius with his face buried under his cockaded hat (which his nose alone prevented from slipping down to his chin), and his hands lost in his ample sleeves, and the skirts of his coat coming right down to his feet, which were encased in enormous boots; but when she saw him obliged to throw his head right back before he could see anything, and raise his knee at each step as though he were going to take a river in his stride, and move like a blind man when he had an order given him, she gave a shout of laughter. The Baron turned round, looked for a moment at the little fellow who stood looking so confused in his big clothes, and then he too was overcome with laughter, and, hardly able to speak, called out to his wife:

“Lo-lo-look at Ma-Marius! Does-doesn't he look fun-funny?”

The Baronne leaned out of the carriage-window, and, catching sight of Marius, she was shaken by such a fit of laughter that the carriage moved up and down on its springs as if it were jolting over some deep ruts.

“What on earth is there to laugh at like that?” said Julien, his face pale with anger. “You must be perfect idiots, all of you.”

Jeanne sat down on the steps, holding her sides and quite unable to contain herself; the Baron followed her example, and, inside the carriage, convulsive sneezes and a sort of continual clucking intimated that the Baronne was suffocating with laughter. At last Marius' coat began to shake; no doubt, he understood the cause of all this mirth, and he giggled himself, beneath his big hat. Julien rushed towards

him in a rage; he gave him a box on the ear which knocked the boy's hat off and sent it rolling on to the grass; then, turning to the Baron, he said, in a voice that trembled with anger:

"I think you ought to be the last one to laugh. Whose fault is it that you are ruined? We should not be like this if you had not squandered your fortune and thrown away your money right and left."

All the laughter stopped abruptly, but no one spoke. Jeanne, ready to cry now, quietly took her place beside her mother. The Baron, without a word, sat down opposite, and Julien got up on the box, after lifting up the crying boy whose cheek was beginning to swell. The long drive was performed in silence, for they all felt awkward and unable to converse on ordinary topics. They could only think of the incident that had just happened, and, rather than broach such a painful subject, they preferred to sit in dull silence.

To the irregular trot of the two horses the carriage went along past the farm-yards, startling the black fowls and sending them to the hedges for refuge, and sometimes a yelping dog followed for a little while and then ran back to his kennel with bristling hair, turning round every now and then to send another bark after the carriage. A lad in muddy sabots was slouching along with his hands in his pockets, his blouse blown out by the wind and his long lazy legs dragging one after the other, and as he stood on one side for the carriage to pass, he awkwardly pulled off his cap, showing his lank hair plastered down on his head. Between each farm lay meadows with other farms dotted here and there in

the distance. Finally they turned up an avenue of firs which bordered the road. Here the carriage leant on one side as it passed over the deep ruts, and the Baronne began to give little screams. At the end of the avenue there was a white gate which was shut. Marius jumped down to open it, and then they drove round an immense lawn and drew up before a high, gloomy-looking house which had all its shutters closed.

The hall-door opened, and an old, semi-paralysed servant (in a red and black striped waistcoat, over which was tied an apron) limped sideways down the steps; after asking the visitors' names he showed them into a large drawing-room, and drew up the closed Venetian blinds. The furniture was all covered up, and the clock and candelabra were enveloped in white cloths; the room smelt mouldy, and its damp, cold atmosphere seemed to chill one to the very heart. The visitors sat down and waited. Foot-steps could be heard on the floor above, hurrying along in an unusual bustle, for the owners of the house had been taken unawares and were changing their clothes as quickly as possible; a bell rang several times and then they could hear more foot-steps on the stairs. The Baronne, feeling thoroughly cold, began to sneeze frequently; Julien walked up and down the room, Jeanne was gloomy and sat by her mother, while the Baron stood scowling with his back against the marble mantelpiece.

At last a door opened, and the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville appeared. They were a little, thin couple of an uncertain age, of mincing gait, both

very formal and rather embarrassed. The Vicomtesse wore a flowered silk gown and a cap trimmed with ribbons, and spoke in a sharp, quick voice. Her husband was in a tight frock-coat; his hair looked as if it had been waxed, and his nose, his eyes, his long teeth and his coat, which was evidently his best one, all shone as if they had been polished with the greatest care. He returned his visitors' bow with a bend of the knees.

When the ordinary complimentary phrases had been exchanged no one knew what to say next, so they all politely expressed their pleasure at making this new acquaintance and hoped it would be a lasting one; for, living as they did in the country all the year round, an occasional visit made an agreeable change. The icy air of the drawing-room froze the very marrow of their bones, and the Baronne was seized by a fit of coughing, interrupted at intervals by a sneeze. The Baron rose to go.

"You are not going to leave us already? Pray, stay a little longer," said the Brisevilles.

But Jeanne followed her father's example in spite of all the signs made her by Julien, who thought they were leaving too soon. The Vicomtesse would have rung to order the Baron's carriage, but the bell was out of order, so the Vicomte went to find a servant. He soon returned, to say that the horses had been taken out, and put in the stables. They had to wait. Every one tried to find some subject of conversation; the rainy winter was discussed, and Jeanne, who could not prevent herself shivering, try as she would, asked if their hosts did not find it very dull living alone all the year round. Such a question astounded

the Brisevilles. Their time was always fully occupied, what with writing long letters to their numerous aristocratic relations and pompously discussing the most trivial matters, for in all their useless, petty occupations, they were as formally polite to each other as they would have been to utter strangers. Beneath the high ceiling, blackened with age, of the huge drawing-room, uninhabited and wrapped in cloths, the old couple, so small, so clean, so formal, looked to Jeanne like preserved aristocrats. At last the carriage, with its two ill-matched steeds, drew up before the door, but Marius was nowhere to be seen; he had gone for a walk in the fields, thinking he would not be wanted again until the evening. Julien, in a great rage, left word for him to be sent after them on foot, and, after a great many bows and compliments, they started for Les Peuples again.

As soon as they were fairly off, Jeanne and the Baron, in spite of the uncomfortable feeling that Julien's ill-temper had caused, began to laugh and joke about the Brisevilles' ways and tones. The Baron imitated the husband and Jeanne the wife, and the Baronne, feeling a little hurt in her reverence for aristocracy, said to them:

"You should not joke in that way. I'm sure the Brisevilles are very well-bred people, and they belong to excellent families."

They stopped laughing for a time, out of respect for the Baronne's feelings, but every now and then Jeanne would catch her father's eye, and then they began again. The Baron would make a very stiff bow, and say in a solemn voice:

"Your château at Les Peuples must be very cold, Madame, with the sea-breeze blowing on it all day long."

Then Jeanne put on a very prim look, and said with a smirk, moving her head all the time like a duck on the water:

"Oh, Monsieur, I have plenty to fill up my time. You see we have so many relations to whom letters must be written, and M. de Briseville leaves all correspondence to me, as his time is taken up with the religious history of Normandy that he is writing in collaboration with the Abbé Pelle."

The Baronne could not help smiling, but she repeated, in a half-vexed, half-amused tone:

"It isn't right to laugh at people of our own rank like that."

All at once the carriage came to a standstill, and Julien called out to someone on the road behind; Jeanne and the Baron leant out of the windows, and saw some singular creature, rolling, rather than running, towards them. Hindered by the floating skirts of his coat, unable to see for his hat, which kept slipping over his eyes, his sleeves waving like the sails of a windmill, splashing through the puddles, stumbling over every large stone in his way, hastening, jumping, covered with mud, Marius was running after the carriage as fast as his legs could carry him. As soon as he came up Julien leant down, caught hold of him by the coat collar, and lifted him up on the box seat; then, dropping the reins, he began to pommel the boy's hat, which at once slipped down to his shoulders. Inside the hat, which sounded as if it had been a drum, Marius yelled at the top of his

voice, but it was in vain that he struggled and tried to jump down, for his master held him firmly with one hand while he beat him with the other.

"Papa! oh, papa!" gasped Jeanne; and the Baronne, filled with indignation, seized her husband's arm, and exclaimed: "Stop him, Jacques, stop him!" The Baron suddenly let down the front window, and, catching hold of the Vicomte's sleeve:

"Are you going to stop beating that child?" he said in a voice that trembled with anger.

Julien turned round in astonishment.

"But don't you see what a state the little wretch has got his livery into?"

"What does that matter to me?" exclaimed the Baron, with his head between the two. "You shall not be so rough with him."

Julien got angry.

"Kindly leave me alone," he said; "it's nothing to do with you;" and he raised his hand to strike the lad again. The Baron caught hold of his son-in-law's wrist, and flung his uplifted hand heavily down against the woodwork of the seat, crying:

"If you don't stop that, I'll get out and soon make you."

He spoke in so determined a tone that the Vicomte's rage suddenly vanished, and, shrugging his shoulders, he whipped up the horses, and the carriage moved on again. The two women sat still, pale with fright, and the beating of the Baronne's heart could be distinctly heard. At dinner that evening Julien was more agreeable than usual, and behaved as if nothing had happened. Jeanne, her father, and Madame Adelaide easily forgave, and,

touched by his good temper, they joined in his gaiety with a feeling of relief. When Jeanne mentioned the Brisevilles, her husband even made a joke about them, though he quickly added:

"But one can see at once that they are gentle-people."

No more visits were paid, as everyone dreaded any reference to Marius, but they were going to send cards to their neighbours on New Year's day, and then wait to call on them until the first warm days of spring.

Christmas came and the priest, the mayor, and his wife came to dinner. They were invited again on New Year's day, and their two visits formed the only break in the monotonous days. The Baron and Baronne were to leave Les Peuples on the ninth of January; Jeanne wanted them to stay longer, but Julien did not second her invitation, so in view of his son-in-law's increasing coldness the Baron ordered the post-chaise to be sent from Rouen. The evening before they went away was clear and frosty, and as they had finished packing, Jeanne and her father walked down to Yport, for they had not been there since Jeanne's return from Corsica.

They went across the wood where she had walked on her wedding-day, clinging close to him whose companion she was henceforth to be, where she had received his first kiss, and had caught her first glimpse of that sensual love which was not fully revealed to her till that day in the valley of Ota when she had drunk her husband's kisses with the water.

There were no leaves, no climbing plants, in the copse now, only the rustling of the branches, and

that dry, crackling noise that seems to fill the bare woods in winter.

They reached the little village and went along the empty, silent streets, which smelt of fish and of seaweed. The big brown nets were drying before the doors, or stretched out on the shingle as of old. The cold, gray sea, with its eternal roar of foam, was receding, and in the direction of Fécamp the green rocks at the foot of the cliff could be seen. And all along the beach the big boats lay on their sides looking like huge dead fish.

As night drew on, the fishermen, walking heavily in their big sea-boots, began to come down on the shingle in groups, their necks well wrapped up in woolen scarfs, and carrying a litre of brandy in one hand, and the boat-lantern in the other. They busied themselves round the boats, putting on board, with true Normandy slowness, their nets, their buoys, a big loaf, a jar of butter, and the bottle of brandy and a glass. Then they pushed off the boats, which went down the beach with a harsh noise, then rushed through the surf, balanced themselves on the crest of a wave for a few seconds, spread their brown wings and disappeared into the night, with their little lights shining at the bottom of the masts. The sailors' wives, their big bony frames shown off by their thin dresses, stayed until the last fisherman had gone off, and then went back to the hushed village, where their noisy voices roused the sleeping echoes of the gloomy streets.

The Baron and Jeanne stood watching these men go off into the darkness, as they went off every night, risking their lives to keep themselves from starving,

and yet gaining so little that they could never afford to eat meat.

"What a terrible, beautiful thing is the ocean!" said the Baron. "How many lives are at this very moment in danger on it, and yet how exquisite it looks now, with the shadows falling over it! Doesn't it, Jeannette?"

"This is not so pretty as the Mediterranean," she answered with a watery smile.

"The Mediterranean!" exclaimed her father scornfully. "Why, the Mediterranean's nothing but oil or sugared water, the blue water of a wash-tub, while this sea is terrific with its crests of foam and its wild waves. And think of those men who have just gone off on it, and who are already out of sight."

Jeanne gave in.

"Yes, perhaps you are right," she said with a sigh, for the word "Mediterranean" had sent a pang through her heart, and turned her thoughts to those far-away countries where all her dreams lay buried.

Father and daughter did not go back through the wood, but walked along the road going slowly up hill; they walked in silence, for both were saddened by the thought of the morrow's parting. As they passed the farmhouses, they could smell the crushed apples — that scent of new cider which pervades all Normandy at this time of the year — or the strong odour of cows and the healthy, warm smell of a dunghill. The dwelling houses could be distinguished by their little lighted windows.

It seemed to Jeanne that her soul was expanding, that she was understanding invisible things, and these tiny lights, scattered over the country, made

A WOMAN'S LIFE

her think of the loneliness of human creatures, and how everything tends to separate and tear them away from those they love.

"Life is not always gay," she said in tones of resignation.

The Baron sighed.

"That is true, my child," he replied; "but we cannot help it."

The next day the Baron and Baronne went away, leaving Jeanne and Julien alone.

VII.

CARDS now became part of the young couple's existence. Every day after lunch Jeanne played several games of bezique with her husband, while he smoked his pipe and drank six or eight glasses of brandy. Then Jeanne went upstairs to her bedroom, and, sitting by the window, worked at a petticoat flounce she was embroidering, while the wind and rain beat against the panes. When tired she looked out at the foamy, restless sea, gazed at it for a few minutes, and then took up her work again.

She had nothing else to do, for Julien had taken the entire management of the house into his hands, that he might thoroughly satisfy his longing for authority and his mania for economy. He was exceedingly stingy; he never gave tips, never allowed any food that was not strictly necessary. Every morning, ever since she had been at Les Peuples, the baker had made Jeanne a little Normandy cake, but Julien cut off this expense, and Jeanne had to content herself with toast.

Wishing to avoid all arguments and quarrels, she never made any remark, but each fresh proof of her husband's avarice hurt her like the prick of a needle. It seemed so petty, so odious to her, brought up as she had been in a family where money was never

thought of any importance. How often she had heard her mother say: "Money is made to be spent"; but now Julien kept saying to her: "Will you never be cured of throwing money away?" Whenever he could manage to reduce a salary or a bill by a few pence he would slip the money into his pocket, saying, with a smile:

"Little streams make big rivers."

Jeanne would sometimes find herself dreaming as she used to do before she was married. She would gradually stop working, and with her hands lying idle in her lap and her eyes fixed on space, she built castles in the air as if she were a young girl again. But the voice of Julien, giving an order to old Simon, would call her back to the realities of life, and she would take up her work, thinking, "Ah, that is all over and done with now," and a tear would fall on her fingers as they pushed the needle through the stuff.

Rosalie, who used to be so gay and lively, always singing snatches of songs as she went about her work, gradually changed also. Her plump and round cheeks had fallen in and lost their brightened colour, and her skin was muddy and dark. Jeanne would often ask: "Are you ill, my girl?" But the little maid always answered with a faint blush, "No, Madame," and got away as quickly as she could. Instead of tripping along as she had always done, she now dragged herself painfully from room to room, and seemed not even to care how she looked, for the peddlers in vain spread out their ribbons and corsets and bottles of scent before her; she never bought anything from them now. And the huge house

sounded empty, while the rain stained its front with long grey streams.

At the end of January, the snow came. From afar great heavy clouds came across the dark sea from the north, and there was a heavy fall of snow. In one night the whole plain was whitened, and, in the morning the trees looked as if a mantle of frozen foam had been cast over them.

Julien in his high boots, and looking unshaven, passed his time in the ditch between the wood and the plain, watching for the migrating birds. Every now and then his shots would break the frozen silence of the fields, and hordes of black crows flew from the trees in terror. Jeanne, tired of staying indoors, would go out on the steps of the house. Sounds of life came from a distance, echoing over the still sleep of the livid and sad fields of snow. Then she heard nothing but the far-away murmur of the waves and the soft continual rustle of the falling snow. And the snow piled up ceaselessly under the rain of this light thick moss.

On one of these cold, white mornings she was sitting by her bedroom fire, while Rosalie, who looked worse and worse every day, was slowly making her bed. All at once Jeanne heard a sigh of pain behind her. Without turning her head, she asked:

"What is the matter with you?"

The maid answered as she always did:

"Nothing, Madame," but her voice seemed to die away as she spoke.

Jeanne had left off thinking about her, when she suddenly noticed that she could not hear the girl moving. She called: "Rosalie."

There was no answer. Then she thought that the maid must have gone quietly out of the room without her hearing her, and she cried in a louder tone: "Rosalie!" Again she received no answer, and she was just stretching out her hand to ring the bell, when she heard a low moan close beside her. She started up in terror.

Rosalie was sitting on the floor with her back against the bed, her legs stretched stiffly out, her face livid, and her eyes staring straight before her. Jeanne rushed to her side.

"Oh, Rosalie! What is the matter? what is it?" she asked in afright.

The maid did not answer a word or make a movement, but fixed her wild eyes on her mistress and gasped for breath, as if tortured by some excruciating pain. Then, stiffening every muscle in her body, and stifling a cry of anguish between her clenched teeth, she slipped down on her back, and all at once, something stirred underneath her dress, which clung tightly round her legs. Jeanne heard a strange, gushing noise, something like the death-rattle of someone who is suffocating, and then came a long low wail of pain; it was the first cry of suffering of a child entering the world.

The sound came as a revelation to her, and, suddenly losing her head, she rushed to the top of the stairs, crying:

"Julien! Julien!"

"What do you want?" he answered, from below.

She gasped out, "It's Rosalie who — who —" but before she could say any more Julien was rushing up the stairs two at a time; he dashed into the

bedroom, raised the girl's clothes, and there lay a hideous little atom of humanity, wrinkled, whining, rigid and sticky, which was moving between two bare legs. He got up with an evil look on his face, and pushed his distracted wife out of the room, saying:

"This is no place for you. Go away and send me Ludivine and old Simon."

Jeanne went down to the kitchen trembling all over, and then afraid to go upstairs again, she went into the drawing-room, where a fire was never lighted, now her parents were away, and waited anxiously for news. Soon she saw Simon run out of the house, and come back five minutes after with Widow Dentu, the village midwife. Next she heard a noise on the stairs which sounded as if they were carrying a body, then Julien came to tell her that she could go back to her room. She was trembling as if she had just witnessed some terrible accident. She sat down again in front of her fire, and then asked:

"How is she?"

Julien, apparently in a great rage, was walking about the room in a preoccupied, nervous way. He did not answer his wife for some moments, but at last he asked, stopping in his walk:

"Well, what do you mean to do with this girl?"

Jeanne looked at her husband as if she did not understand his question.

"What do you mean?" she said. "I don't know; how should I?"

"Well, anyhow, we can't keep that child in the house," he cried, angrily.

Jeanne looked very perplexed, and sat in silence for some time. At last she said:

"But, my dear, we could put it out to nurse somewhere?"

He hardly let her finish her sentence.

"And who'll pay for it? Will you?"

"But surely the father will take care of it," she said, after another long silence. "And if he marries Rosalie, everything will be all right."

"The father!" answered Julien, roughly; "the father! Do you know who is the father? Of course you don't. Very well, then!"

Jeanne, who was moved, took courage: "But he certainly will not forsake the girl; it would be such a cowardly thing to do. We will ask her his name, and go and see him and force him to give some account of himself."

Julien had become calmer, and was again walking about the room.

"My dear girl," he replied, "I don't believe she will tell you the man's name, or me either. Besides, suppose he wouldn't marry her? You must see that we can't keep a girl and her illegitimate child in our house."

But Jeanne would only repeat, doggedly:

"Then the man must be a villain; but we will find out who he is, and then he will have us to deal with instead of that poor girl."

Julien got very red.

"But until we know who he is?" he asked.

She did not know what to propose, so she asked Julien what he thought was the best thing to do. He gave his opinion very promptly.

"Oh, I should give her some money, and let her and her brat go to the devil."

That made Jeanne very indignant.

"That shall never be done," she declared; "Rosalie is my foster-sister, and we have grown up together. She has erred, it is true, but I will never turn her out-of-doors for that, and, if there is no other way out of the difficulty, I will bring up the child myself."

"And we should have a nice reputation, shouldn't we, with our name and connections?" burst out Julien. "People would say that we encouraged vice, and sheltered prostitutes, and respectable people would never come near us. Why, what can you be thinking of? You must be mad!"

"I will never have Rosalie turned out," she repeated, quietly. "If you will not keep her here, my mother will take her back again. But we are sure to find out the name of the father."

At that, he went out of the room, too angry to talk to her any longer, and as he banged the door after him he cried:

"Women are fools with their absurd notions!"

In the afternoon Jeanne went up to see the invalid. She was lying in bed, wide awake, and the Widow Dentu was rocking the child in her arms. As soon as she saw her mistress Rosalie began to sob violently, and when Jeanne wanted to kiss her, she turned away and hid her face under the bed-clothes. The nurse interfered and drew down the sheet, and then Rosalie made no further resistance, though the tears still ran down her cheeks.

The room was very cold, for there was only a

small fire in the grate, and the child was crying. Jeanne did not dare make any reference to the little one, for fear of causing another burst of tears, but she held Rosalie's hand and kept repeating mechanically:

"It will be all right. It will be all right."

The poor girl glanced shyly at the nurse from time to time; the child's cries seemed to pierce her heart, and sobs still escaped from her occasionally, though she forced herself to swallow her tears. Jeanne kissed her again, and whispered in her ear: "We'll take good care of it, you may be sure of that," and then ran quickly out of the room, for Rosalie's tears were beginning to flow again.

After that, Jeanne went up every day to see the invalid, and every day Rosalie burst into tears when her mistress came into the room. The child was put out to nurse, and Julien would hardly speak to his wife, as if he were very angry with her for refusing to dismiss the maid. One day he returned to the subject, but Jeanne drew out a letter from her mother in which the Baronne said that if they would not keep Rosalie at Les Peuples she was to be sent on to Rouen directly.

"Your mother's as great a fool as you are," cried Julien; but he did not say anything more about sending Rosalie away, and a fortnight later the maid was able to get up and perform her duties again.

One morning Jeanne made her sit down, and holding both her hands in hers;

"Now, then, Rosalie, tell me all about it," she said, looking her straight in the face.

Rosalie began to tremble.

"All about what, Madame?" she said, timidly.

"Who is the father of your child?" asked Jeanne.

Then a terrible despair seized the maid and she struggled to disengage her hands from her mistress's grasp, to hide her face in them. But Jeanne kissed her, in spite of her struggles, and tried to console her.

"It is true you have been weak," she said, "but you are not the first to whom such a misfortune has happened, and, if only the father of the child marries you, no one will think anything more about it; we would employ him, and he could live here with you."

Rosalie moaned as if she were being tortured, and tried to get her hands free that she might run away.

"I can quite understand how ashamed you feel," went on Jeanne, "but you see that I am not angry, and that I speak kindly to you. I wish to know this man's name for your own good, for I fear, from your grief, that he means to abandon you, and I want to prevent that. Julien will see him, and we will make him marry you, and we shall employ you both; we will see that he makes you happy."

This time Rosalie made so vigorous an effort that she succeeded in wrenching her hands away from her mistress, and she rushed from the room as if she were mad.

"I have tried to make Rosalie tell me her seducer's name," said Jeanne to her husband at dinner that evening, "but I did not succeed in doing so. Try and see if she will tell you, that we may force the wretch to marry her."

"There, don't let me hear any more about all that," he said, angrily. "You wanted to keep this

girl, and you have done so, but don't bother me about her."

He seemed still more irritable since Rosalie's confinement than he had been before. He had got into the habit of shouting at his wife, whenever he spoke to her, as if he were always angry, while she, on the contrary, spoke softly, and did everything to avoid a quarrel; but she often cried when she was alone in her room at night. In spite of his bad temper, Julien had resumed the marital duties he had so neglected since his wedding tour, and it was seldom now that he let three nights pass without accompanying his wife to her room.

Rosalie soon got quite well again, and with better health came better spirits, but she always seemed frightened and haunted by some strange dread. She ran away on two other occasions, when Jeanne again tried to question her. Julien suddenly became better tempered, and his young wife began to cherish vague hopes, and to regain a little of her former gaiety; but she often felt very unwell, though she never said anything about it.

The thaw had not set in. For five weeks a sky without a cloud by day, and strewn by night with stars that looked like frost, so cold was the firmament, gazed down upon the solid, hard, glistening carpet of snow. Standing alone in their square courtyards, behind the great frosted trees, the farms seemed dead beneath their snowy shrouds. Neither men nor cattle could go out, and the only sign of life about the homesteads and cottages was the smoke that went straight up from the chimneys into the frosty air.

A WOMAN'S LIFE

The grass, the hedges and the wall of elms seemed killed by the cold. From time to time the trees cracked, as if the fibres of their branches were separating beneath the bark, and sometimes a big branch would break off and fall to the ground, its sap frozen and dried up by the intense cold.

Jeanne longed for a return of the warm breezes, attributing to the terrible severity of the weather all the vague suffering she experienced. Sometimes the very idea of food disgusted her, and she could eat nothing; sometimes her pulse beat wildly; at other times she vomited after every meal, unable to digest the little she did eat. Her strained nerves were always on the rack and she lived in a constant and intolerable state of nervous excitement.

One evening, when the thermometer was sinking still lower, Julien shivered as he left the dinner table (for the dining-room was never sufficiently heated, so careful was he over the wood), and rubbing his hands together:

"It will be nice to sleep together to-night, won't it, darling?" he whispered. He gave one of his old good-tempered laughs and Jeanne threw her arms round his neck, but she felt so ill, so nervous, and she had such aching pains that evening, that, with her lips close to his, she begged him to let her sleep alone.

"I feel so ill to-night," she said, "but I am sure to be better to-morrow."

"Just as you please, my dear," he answered. "If you are ill, you must take care of yourself." And he began to talk of something else.

Jeanne went to bed early. Julien, for a wonder,

ordered a fire to be lighted in his own room; and when the servant came to tell him that it was "burning up," he kissed his wife on the forehead and said good-night.

The whole house seemed to feel the cold, and the walls made little cracking noises as if they were shivering. Jeanne lay in bed shaking with cold; twice she got up to put more logs on the fire, and to pile her petticoats and dresses on the bed, but nothing seemed to make her any warmer. Her feet were numb, and she had twitchings in her calves and thighs which made her toss and turn restlessly from side to side. Her teeth chattered, her hands trembled, her heart beat so slowly that sometimes it seemed to stop altogether; and she gasped for breath as if she could not draw the air into her lungs.

As the cold crept higher and higher up her limbs, she was seized with a terrible fear. She had never felt like this before; life seemed to be gradually slipping away from her, and she thought each breath she drew would be her last.

"I am going to die! I am going to die!" she thought; and, in her terror, she jumped out of bed, and rang for Rosalie, waited and rang again, and again waited for an answer, shuddering and half-frozen. The maid did not come. Probably she was sunk in that first sleep that is so hard to disturb, and Jeanne, almost beside herself with fear, rushed out to the landing with bare feet. She went noiselessly up the dark stairs, felt for Rosalie's door, opened it, and called "Rosalie!" then went into the room, stumbled against the bed, passed her hands

over it, and found it empty and quite cold, as if no one had slept in it that night.

"Surely she cannot have gone out in such weather as this," she thought.

Her heart began to beat so violently that it almost suffocated her, and she went downstairs to rouse Julien, her legs giving way under her as she walked. She burst open her husband's door, and hurried across the room, spurred on by the idea that she was going to die and by the desire to see him again before she lost consciousness.

By the light of the dying fire she saw Rosalie's head on the pillow beside her husband's. At her cry they both started up. She stood still for a second, horrified at this discovery. Then she fled to her room, as Julien called frantically: "Jeanne!" A fear possessed her of seeing him, of hearing his voice, of listening to his excuses, his lies, of meeting him face to face, and she rushed out again, and down the stairs. She ran in the darkness, at the risk of falling down the steps and breaking a leg on the stones. She ran on, filled with the desire to flee, to know nothing, to see nobody.

On the last step she sat down, still in her night-dress and with bare feet, unable to think, unable to reason, her head in a whirl. Julien had jumped out of bed, and was hastily dressing himself. She started up to escape from him. He came downstairs, crying: "Jeanne, do listen!"

No, she would not listen; he should not degrade her by his touch. She dashed into the dining-room as if a murderer were pursuing her, looked round for a hiding-place or some dark corner where she might

conceal herself, and then crouched down under the table. The door opened, and Julien came in with a light in his hand, still calling, "Jeanne!" She started off again like a hunted hare, tore into the kitchen, round which she ran twice like some wild animal at bay, then, as he was getting nearer and nearer to her, she suddenly flung open the garden door, and rushed out into the night.

Her bare legs sank into the snow up to her knees, and this icy contact gave her desperate strength. Although she had nothing on but her night-dress she did not feel the bitter cold. She felt nothing for her mental anguish was so great that it numbed her body, and she ran on and on, looking as white as the snow-covered earth.

She ran down the main avenue, through the copse, across the ditch and out on to the plain.

There was no moon, the stars were shining like sparks of fire in the black sky; but the plain was light with a dull whiteness, and lay in infinite silence.

Jeanne walked quickly, hardly breathing, not knowing, not thinking of anything. She suddenly stopped on the edge of the cliff. She stopped short, instinctively, and crouched down, bereft of thought and of will power.

In the abyss before her the silent, invisible sea exhaled the salt odour of its wrack at low tide.

She remained thus some time, her mind as inert as her body; then, all at once, she began to tremble, to tremble violently, like a sail shaken by the wind. Her arms, her hands, her feet, impelled by an invisible force, throbbed, pulsated wildly, and her consciousness awakened abruptly, sharp and poignant.

Old memories passed before her mental vision: the sail with him in old Lastique's boat, their conversation, the dawn of their love; the christening of the boat. Then her thoughts went still farther back till they reached the night of her arrival at Les Peuples — the night she had spent in happy dreams. And now, now! Her life was ruined; she had had all her pleasure; there were no joys, no happiness, in store for her; and she could see the terrible future with all its tortures, its deceptions, and despair. Surely it would be better to die now, at once.

She heard a voice in the distance crying:

"This way! this way! Here are her foot-marks!"

It was Julien looking for her.

Oh! she could not, she would not, see him again! Never again! From the abyss before her came the faint sound of the waves as they broke on the rocks. She stood up to throw herself over the cliff, and in a despairing farewell to life, she moaned out that last cry of the dying — the word that the soldier gasps out as he lies wounded to death on the battlefield — "Mother!"

Then the thought of how her mother would sob when she heard of her daughter's death, and how her father would kneel in agony beside her mangled corpse, flashed across her mind, and in that one second she realized all the bitterness of their grief. She fell feebly back on the snow, and she did not move when Julien and old Simon came up, with Marius behind them holding a lantern. They drew her back by the arm, so near the edge of the cliff was she; and they did with her what they liked,

for she could not move a muscle. She knew that they carried her indoors, that she was put to bed, and rubbed with hot flannels, and then she was conscious of nothing more.

A nightmare — but was it a nightmare? — haunted her. She thought she was in bed in her own room; it was broad daylight, but she could not get up, though she did not know why she could not. She heard a noise on the boards — a scratching, rustling noise — and all at once a little gray mouse ran over the sheet. Then another one appeared, and another which came running towards her chest. Jeanne was not frightened; she wanted to take hold of the little animal, and put out her hand towards it, but she could not catch it.

Then came more mice — ten, twenty, hundreds, thousands, sprang up on all sides. They ran up the bed-posts, and along the tapestry, and covered the whole bed. They got under the clothes, and Jeanne could feel them gliding over her skin, tickling her legs, running up and down her body. She could see them coming from the foot of the bed to get inside and creep close to her breast, but when she struggled and stretched out her hands to catch one, she always clutched the air. Then she got angry, and cried out, and wanted to run away; she fancied some one held her down, and that strong arms were thrown around her to prevent her moving, but she could not see any one. She had no idea of the time that all this lasted; she only knew that it seemed a very long while.

At last she became conscious again. She was tired and aching, but better. She felt very, very weak.

She looked round, and did not feel at all surprised to see her mother sitting by her bedside with a stout man whom she did not know. She had forgotten how old she was, and thought she was a little child again, for her memory was entirely gone.

"See, she is conscious," said the stout man.

The Baronne began to cry, and the big man said:

"Come, come, Madame; I assure you there is no longer any danger, but you must not talk to her; just let her sleep."

It seemed to Jeanne that she lay for a long time in a doze, which became a heavy sleep if she tried to think of anything. She had a vague idea that the past contained something dreadful, and she was content to lie still without trying to recall anything to her memory. But one day, when she opened her eyes, she saw Julien standing beside the bed, and the curtain which hid everything from her was suddenly drawn aside; she remembered what had happened.

She threw back the clothes and sprang out of bed to escape from her husband; but as soon as her feet touched the floor she fell to the ground, for she was too weak to stand. Julien hastened to her assistance, but when he attempted to raise her, she shrieked and rolled from side to side to avoid the contact of his hands. The door opened, and Aunt Lison and the Widow Dentu hurried in, closely followed by the Baron and his wife, the latter gasping for breath.

They put Jeanne to bed again, and she closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep that she might think

undisturbed. Her mother and aunt busied themselves around her, saying from time to time:

“Do you know us now, Jeanne, dear?”

She pretended not to hear them, and made no answer; and in the evening they went away, leaving her to the care of the nurse. She could not sleep all that night, for she was painfully trying to connect the incidents she could remember, one with another; but there seemed to be gaps in her memory, great blanks where nothing was recorded. Little by little, after long efforts, however, all the facts came back to her, and she pondered over them obstinately. She must have been very ill, or her mother and Aunt Lison and the Baron would not have been sent for; but what had Julien said? Did her parents know everything? And where was Rosalie?

What was she to do? What? An idea occurred to her to go back to Rouen with her father and mother. She would be a widow, that was all.

Then she waited and listened to all that went on around her, but she did not let anyone see that she understood everything and had recovered her full senses. She was glad of this return of her reason, and was patient and cunning. Towards evening, when no one but the Baronne was in her room, Jeanne whispered softly:

“Mother, dear!”

She was surprised to hear how changed her own voice was, but the Baronne took her hands, exclaiming:

“My child! my dear little Jeanne! Do you know me, my pet?”

"Yes, mother. But you mustn't cry; I want to talk to you seriously. Did Julien tell you why I ran out into the snow?"

"Yes, my darling. You have had a very dangerous fever."

"That was not the reason, mamma; I had the fever afterwards. Hasn't he told you why I tried to run away, and what was the cause of the fever?"

"No, dear."

"It was because I found Rosalie in his bed."

The Baronne thought she was still delirious, and tried to soothe her.

"There, there, my darling; lie down and try to go to sleep."

But Jeanne continued, obstinately:

"I am not talking nonsense now, mamma dear, though I dare say I have been lately," she said. "I felt very ill one night, and I got up and went to Julien's room; there I saw Rosalie lying beside him. My grief nearly drove me mad, and I ran out into the snow, meaning to throw myself over the cliff."

"Yes, darling, you have been ill; very ill indeed," answered the Baronne.

"It wasn't that, mamma. I found Rosalie in Julien's bed, and I will not stay with him any longer. You shall take me back to Rouen with you."

The doctor had told the Baronne to let Jeanne have her own way in everything, so she answered:

"Very well, my pet."

Jeanne began to lose patience.

"I see you don't believe me," she said pettishly. "Go and find papa; perhaps he'll manage to understand that I am speaking the truth."

The Baronne rose slowly to her feet, dragged herself out of the room with the aid of two sticks, and came back in a few minutes with the Baron. They sat down by the bedside, and Jeanne began to speak in her weak voice. She spoke quite coherently, and she told them all about Julien's odd ways, his harshness, his avarice, and, lastly, his infidelity.

The Baron could see that her mind was not wandering, but he hardly knew what to say or think. He affectionately took her hand, as he used to do when she was a child and he told her fairy tales to send her to sleep.

"Listen, my dear," he said. "We must not do anything rashly. Don't let us say anything till we have thought it well over. Will you promise me to try and bear with your husband until we have decided what is best to be done?"

"Very well," she answered; "but I will not stay here after I get well."

Then she added, in a whisper: "Where is Rosalie now?"

"You shall not see her any more," replied the Baron.

But she persisted: "Where is she? I want to know."

He owned that she was still in the house, but he declared she should go at once.

Directly he left Jeanne's room, his heart full of pity for his child and indignation against her husband, the Baron went to find Julien, and said to him sternly:

"Monsieur, I have come to ask for an explanation of your behaviour to my daughter. You have not

only been false to her, but you have deceived her with your servant, which makes your conduct doubly infamous."

Julien pretended to be innocent, denied everything, swore, and called heaven to witness his denial. What proof was there? Wasn't Jeanne mad? Was she not just recovering from brain fever? And had she not rushed out in the snow one night at the beginning of her illness, in a fit of delirium? And how could her statement be believed when, on the very night that she said she had surprised her maid in her husband's bed, she was dashing over the house nearly naked?

He got very angry, and threatened the Baron with an action if he did not withdraw his accusation; and the Baron, confused by this indignant denial, began to make excuses and to beg his son-in-law's pardon; but Julien refused to take his outstretched hand.

Jeanne did not seem vexed when she heard what her husband had said.

"He is telling a lie, papa," she said, quietly; "but we will force him to own the truth."

For two days she lay silent, turning over all sorts of things in her mind; on the third morning she asked for Rosalie. The Baron refused to let the maid go up and told Jeanne that she had left. But Jeanne insisted on seeing her, and said:

"Send some one to fetch her, then."

When the doctor came she was very excited because they would not let her see the maid, and they told him what was the matter. Jeanne burst into tears and almost shrieked: "I will see her! I will see her!"

The doctor took her hand and said in a low voice:

"Calm yourself, Madame. Any violent emotion might have very serious results just now, for you are pregnant."

She was astonished, as though she had been struck, and at once she fancied she could feel a movement within her, and she lay still, paying no attention to what was being said, buried in thought. She could not sleep that night; it seemed so strange to think that within her was another life, and she felt sorry because it was Julien's child, and full of fears lest it should resemble its father.

The next morning she sent for the Baron.

"Papa, dear," she said, "I have made up my mind to know the whole truth; especially now. You hear, I *will* know it, and you know, you must let me do as I like, because of my condition. Now listen; go and fetch the priest; he must be here to make Rosalie tell the truth. Then, as soon as he is here, you must send her up to me, and you and mamma must come too; but, whatever you do, don't let Julien know what is going on."

The priest came about an hour afterwards. He was fatter than ever, and panted quite as much as the Baronne. He sat down in an arm-chair his paunch hanging between his legs, and began joking, while he wiped his forehead with his checked handkerchief from sheer habit.

Well, Madame, I don't think we are either of us getting thinner; in my opinion we make a very handsome pair." Then turning to the invalid, he said: "Ah, ah! my young lady, I hear we're soon to have a christening, and that it won't be the christening of a boat either, this time, ha, ha, ha!" Then

he went on in a grave voice, "It will be one more defender for the country, or," after a short silence, "another good wife and mother like you, Madame," with a bow to the Baronne.

The door flew open and there stood Rosalie, crying, struggling, and refusing to move, while the Baron tried to push her in. At last he gave her a sudden shake, and threw her into the room with a jerk, and she stood in the middle of the floor, with her face in her hands, sobbing violently. As soon as she saw her Jeanne started up as white as a sheet, and her heart could be seen beating under her thin night-dress. It was some time before she could speak, but at last she gasped out:

"There — there — is no — need for me to — question you. Your confusion in my presence — is — is quite sufficient — proof — of your guilt."

She stopped for a few moments for want of breath, and then went on again:

"But I wish to know all. I have sent for the priest, so you understand you will have to answer as if you were at confession."

Rosalie had not moved and she almost shrieked between her clenched hands. The Baron, losing all patience with her, seized her hands, drew them roughly from her face and threw her on her knees beside the bed, saying:

"Why don't you say something? Answer."

She crouched down on the ground in the position in which Mary Magdalene is generally depicted; her cap was on one side, her apron on the floor, and as soon as her hands were free she again buried her face in them.

"Come, come, my girl," said the priest, "we don't want to do you any harm, but we must know exactly what has happened. Now listen to what is asked you and answer truthfully."

Jeanne was leaning over the side of the bed, looking at the girl.

"Is it not true that I found you in Julien's bed?" she asked.

"Yes, Madame," moaned out Rosalie through her fingers.

At that the Baronne burst into choking tears also, and her convulsive sobs accompanied Rosalie's.

"How long had that gone on?" asked Jeanne, her eyes fixed on the maid.

"Ever since he came here," stammered Rosalie.

"Since he came here," repeated Jeanne, hardly understanding what the words meant. "Do you mean since — since the spring?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Since he first came to the house?"

"Yes, Madame."

As if the questions were stifling her, Jeanne asked rapidly:

"But how did it happen? How did he ask you? How did he have you? What did he say? When did you give yourself to him? How could you do such a thing?"

Rosalie, taking her hands from her face and speaking as if the words were forced from her by an irresistible desire to talk and to tell all. "I dunno. The day he dined here for the first time, he came up to my room. He had hidden in the garret and I dursn't cry out for fear of what everyone would

say. He got into my bed, and I dunno' how it was or what I did, but he did just as he liked with me. I never said nothin' about it because I thought he was nice."

"But your — your child? Is it his?" cried Jeanne.

"Yes, Madame," answered Rosalie, between her sobs. Then neither said anything more, and the silence was only broken by the Baronne's and Rosalie's sobs.

Jeanne was overwhelmed and the tears rose to her eyes, and flowed noiselessly down her cheeks. So her maid's child had the same father as her own! All her anger had evaporated and in its place was a dull, gloomy, deep despair. After a short silence she said in a softer, tearful voice.

"After we returned from — from our wedding trip — when did he begin again?"

"The — the night you came back," answered the maid, who was now almost lying on the floor.

Each word wrung Jeanne's heart. He had actually left her for this girl the very night of their return to Les Peuples! That, then, was why he had let her sleep alone. She had heard enough now; she did not want to know anything more, and she cried to the girl:

"Go away! go away!"

As Rosalie, overcome by her emotion, did not move, she called to her father:

"Take her away! Carry her out of the room!"

But the priest, who had said nothing up to now, thought the time had come for a little discourse.

"You have behaved very wickedly," he said to Rosalie, "very wickedly indeed, and the good God

will not easily forgive you. Think of the punishment which awaits you if you do not live a better life henceforth. Now you are young is the time to train yourself in good ways. No doubt Madame will do something for you, and we shall be able to find you a husband —”

He would have gone on like this for a long time had not the Baron seized Rosalie by the shoulders, dragged her to the door and thrown her into the passage like a bundle of clothes.

When he came back, looking whiter even than his daughter, the priest began again:

“Well, you know, all the girls round here are the same. It is a very bad state of things, but it can't be helped, and we must make a little allowance for the weakness of human nature. They never marry until they are pregnant; never, Madame. One might almost call it a local custom,” he added, with a smile. Then he went on indignantly: “Even the children are the same. Only last year I found a little boy and girl from my class in the cemetery together. I told their parents, and what do you think they replied: ‘Well, father, we didn't teach it them; we can't help it.’ So you see, your maid has only done like the others —”

“The maid!” interrupted the Baron, trembling with excitement. “The maid! What do I care about her? It's Julien's conduct which I think so abominable, and I shall certainly take my daughter away with me.” He walked up and down the room, getting more and more angry with every step he took. “It is infamous the way he has deceived my daughter, infamous! He's a wretch, a villain, and

I will tell him so to his face. I'll horsewhip him within an inch of his life."

The priest was slowly enjoying a pinch of snuff as he sat beside the Baronne, and thinking how he could make peace. "Come now, between ourselves he has only done like everyone else. I am quite sure you don't know many husbands who are faithful to their wives, do you now?" And he added in a sly, good-natured way: "I bet you, yourself, have played your little games; you can't say conscientiously that you haven't, I know. Why, of course you have!" The Baron had stopped, flabbergasted, in front of the priest, who went on: "And who knows but what you have made the acquaintance of some little maid just like Rosalie. I tell you every man is the same. And your escapades didn't make your wife unhappy, or lessen your affection for her; did they?"

The Baron stood still in confusion. It was true indeed that he had done the same himself, and not only once or twice, but as often as he had got the chance; his wife's presence in the house had never made any difference, when the servants were pretty. And was he a villain because of that? Then why should he judge Julien's conduct so severely when he had never thought that any fault could be found with his own?

Though her tears were hardly dried, the idea of her husband's pranks brought a slight smile to the Baronne's lip, for she was one of those good-natured, tenderhearted, sentimental women to whom love adventures are an essential part of existence.

Jeanne lay back exhausted, thinking, with open unseeing eyes, of all this painful episode. The

expression that had wounded her most in Rosalie's confession was: "I never said anything about it because I thought he was nice." She, his wife, had also thought him "nice," and that was the sole reason why she had united herself to him for life, had given up every other hope, every other project to join her destiny to his. She had plunged into marriage, into this pit from which there was no escape, into all this misery, this grief, this despair, simply because, like Rosalie, she had thought him nice.

The door was flung violently open and Julien came in, looking perfectly wild with rage. He had seen Rosalie moaning on the landing, and guessing that she had been forced to speak, he had come to see what was going on; but at the sight of the priest he was taken thoroughly aback.

"What is it? What is the matter?" he asked, in a voice which trembled in spite of his efforts to make it sound calm.

The Baron, who had been so violent just before, dared say nothing after the priest's argument, in case his son-in-law should quote his own example; the Baronne only wept more bitterly than before, and Jeanne raised herself on her hands and looked steadily at this man who was causing her so much sorrow. Her breath came and went quickly, but she managed to answer:

"The matter is that we know all about your shameful conduct ever since — ever since the day you first came here; we know that — that — Rosalie's child is yours — like — like mine, and that they will be — brothers."

Her grief became so poignant at this thought that she hid herself under the bedclothes and sobbed bitterly. Julien stood open-mouthed, not knowing what to say or do. The priest again interposed.

"Come, come, my dear young lady," he said, "you mustn't give way like that. See now, be reasonable."

He rose, went to the bedside, and laid his cool hand on this despairing woman's forehead. His simple touch seemed to soothe her wonderfully; she felt calmer at once, as if the large hand of this peasant accustomed to gestures of absolution and sympathy, had borne with it some strange, peace-giving power.

The good man remained standing and resumed: "Madame, we must always forgive. You are borne down by a great grief, but God, in His mercy, has also sent you a great joy, since He has permitted you to have hopes of becoming a mother. This child will console you for all your trouble and it is in its name that I implore, that I adjure, you to forgive M. Julien. It will be a fresh tie between you, a pledge of your husband's future fidelity. Can you withdraw your affection from the man whose seed you bear within you?"

She made no answer. She was broken, aching and exhausted now, without strength for anger or vengeance. Her nerves were thoroughly unstrung, and she clung to life but by a very slender thread.

The Baronne, to whom resentment seemed utterly impossible and whose mind was simply incapable of bearing any prolonged strain, said in a low tone:

"Come, Jeanne!"

The priest drew Julien close to the bed and placed his hand in his wife's, giving it a little tap as if to make the union more complete. Then, dropping his professional pulpit tone, he said, with a satisfied air:

"There! that's done. Believe me, it is better so."

The two hands, united thus for an instant, loosed their clasp directly. Julien, not daring to embrace Jeanne, kissed his mother-in-law, then turned on his heel, took the Baron (who, in his heart, was not sorry that everything had finished so quietly) by the arm, and drew him from the room to go and smoke a cigar.

Then the tired invalid went to sleep and the Baronne and the priest began to chat in low tones. He talked of what had just occurred and proceeded to explain his ideas on the subject, while the Baronne assented to everything he said with a nod.

"Very well, then, it's understood," he said, in conclusion. "You give the girl the farm at Barville and I will undertake to find her a good, honest husband. Oh, you may be sure that with twenty thousand francs we shall not want candidates for her hand. We shall merely have difficulty in choosing amongst so many."

The Baronne was smiling happily now, while two tears still lingered on her cheeks, though their moist track had already dried.

"Barville is worth twenty thousand francs, at the very least," she said; "and you understand that it is to be settled on the child though the parents will have it as long as they live."

Then the priest shook hands with the Baronne, and rose to go.

"Don't get up, Madame, don't get up," he exclaimed. "I know too well myself what a step means."

As he went out he met Aunt Lison coming to see her patient. She did not notice anything: no one told her anything, and, as usual, she heard nothing.

VIII.

ROSALIE had left the house and the time of Jeanne's confinement was drawing near. The sorrow she had gone through had taken away all pleasure from the thought of becoming a mother, and she waited for the child's birth without any impatience or curiosity, her mind entirely filled with her presentiment of coming evils.

Spring was close at hand. The bare trees still trembled in the cold wind, but, in the damp grass of the ditches, the yellow primroses were already showing among the decaying autumn leaves. The commons, the farm-yards and the sodden fields exhaled a damp odour, as of fermentation, and little green leaves peeped out of the brown earth and glistened in the sun.

A big, strongly-built woman had been engaged in Rosalie's place, and she now supported the Baronne in her dreary walks along the avenue, where the track made by her foot was always damp and muddy.

Jeanne, low-spirited and in constant pain, leant on her father's arm when she went out, while on her other side walked Aunt Lison, fussy and uneasy, holding her niece's hand, and thinking nervously of this mystery that she would never know. They would all walk for hours without speaking a word, and, while they were out, Julien went all over the

country on horseback, for he had suddenly become very fond of riding.

Nothing came to disturb their dull existence. The Baron, his wife, and the Vicomte, paid a visit to the Fourvilles, whom Julien seemed to know very well, though no one knew exactly how the acquaintance had begun, and another duty call was paid to the Brisevilles, who were still in retirement in their sleepy manor.

One afternoon, about four o'clock, two people on horseback trotted up to the courtyard in front of the château. Julien rushed into his wife's room in great excitement:

"Make haste and go down," he exclaimed. "Here are the Fourvilles. They have come simply to make a neighbourly call as they know the condition you are in. Say I am out but that I shall be in soon. I am just going to clean myself up a bit."

Jeanne, much surprised, went downstairs. A pale, pretty young woman with a sad face, dreamy eyes, and lustreless, fair hair, looking as though the sunlight had never kissed it, quietly introduced her husband, a kind of giant, or ogre with a large red moustache. She added: "We have several times had the pleasure of meeting M. de Lamare. We heard from him how ill you were, and we would not put off coming to see you as neighbours, without any ceremony. You see that we came on horseback. I also had the pleasure the other day of a visit from your mother, and the Baron."

She spoke with perfect ease, familiar but refined. Jeanne was charmed, and fell in love with her at once. "This is a friend," she thought.

The Comte de Fourville, on the contrary, seemed like a bear in the drawing-room. As soon as he was seated, he placed his hat on the chair next him, did not know what to do with his hands, placed them on his knees, then on the arms of the chair, and finally crossed his fingers as if in prayer.

Suddenly Julien entered the room. Jeanne was amazed and did not recognize him. He was shaved. He looked handsome, elegant and attractive as on the day of their betrothal. He shook the hairy paw of the Comte, who seemed to have wakened up on his arrival, kissed the hand of the Comtesse, whose ivory cheeks coloured slightly while her eyelids quivered.

He began to speak; he was charming as in former days. His large eyes, the mirrors of love, had become tender again. And his hair, lately so dull and unkempt, had regained its soft, glossy wave, with the use of a hairbrush and perfumed oil.

At the moment when the Fourvilles were taking their leave the Comtesse, turning towards him, said: "Would you like to take a ride on Thursday, dear Vicomte?"

As he bowed and murmured, "Why, certainly, Madame," she took Jeanne's hand and said in a sympathetic and affectionate tone, with a cordial smile: "Oh! when you are well, we will all three gallop about the country. It will be delightful. What do you say?"

With an easy gesture she held up her riding skirt, looking like a Centaur, and then jumped into the saddle with the lightness of a bird, while her husband, after bowing awkwardly, mounted his

big Norman steed. As they disappeared outside the gate, Julien, who seemed charmed, exclaimed: "What delightful people! those are friends who may be useful to us."

Jeanne, pleased also without knowing why, replied: "The little Comtesse is charming; I feel that I shall love her, but the husband looks like a brute. Where did you meet them?"

He rubbed his hands together good-humouredly. "I met them by chance at the Brisevilles'. The husband seems a little rough. He cares for nothing but hunting, but he is a real noble man for all that."

Nothing else happened until the end of July. Then, one Tuesday evening, as they were all sitting under the plane-tree beside a little table, on which stood two liqueur glasses and a decanter of brandy, Jeanne suddenly turned very white and put both her hands to her side with a cry. A sharp pain had shot through her and at once died away. In about ten minutes came another one, hardly so severe but of longer duration than the first. Her father and husband almost carried her indoors, for the short distance between the plane-tree and her room seemed miles to her; she could not stifle her moans, and, overpowered by an intolerable sense of heaviness and weight, she implored them to let her sit down and rest.

The child was not expected until September but, in case of accident, a horse was harnessed and old Simon galloped off after the doctor. He came about midnight and at once recognized the signs of a premature confinement. The actual pain had a little diminished, but Jeanne felt an awful deathly faint-

ness, and she thought she was going to die, for Death is sometimes so close that his icy breath can almost be felt.

The room was full of people. The Baronne lay back in an armchair gasping for breath; the Baron ran hither and thither, bringing all manner of things, consulting the doctor, and completely losing his head; Julien walked up and down looking very troubled, but feeling quite calm, and the Widow Dentu, whom nothing could surprise or startle, stood at the foot of the bed with an expression suited to the occasion on her face.

The Nurse, midwife and watcher of the dead, equally ready to welcome the new-born infant, to receive its first cry, to immerse it in its first bath and to wrap it in its first covering, or to hear the last word, the last death-rattle, the last moan of the dying, to clothe them in their last garment, to sponge their wasted bodies with vinegar, to wrap them in the winding-sheet, the Widow Dentu had become utterly indifferent to any of the chances accompanying a birth or a death. Ludivine, the cook, and Aunt Lison remained discreetly hidden behind the hall door.

Every now and then Jeanne gave a low moan. For two hours it seemed as if the event were far off; but about daybreak the pains recommenced violently and soon became terrible. As the involuntary cries of anguish burst through her clenched teeth, Jeanne thought of Rosalie who had hardly even suffered or moaned, and whose bastard child had been born without any pain or torture. In her wretched, troubled mind she drew comparisons between her

maid and herself, and she cursed God whom, until now, she had believed just. She thought in angry astonishment of how fate favours the wicked, and of the unpardonable lies of those who hold forth inducements to be upright and good.

Sometimes the agony was so great that she could think of nothing else, her suffering absorbing all her strength, her reason, her consciousness. In the intervals of relief her eyes were fixed on Julien, and then she was filled with a mental anguish as she thought of the day her maid had fallen at the foot of this very bed with her new-born child — the brother of the infant that was now causing her such terrible pain. She remembered perfectly every gesture, every look, every word of her husband as he stood beside the maid, and now she could see in him, as though his movements betrayed his thoughts, the same irritation, the same indifference to her suffering as he had felt for Rosalie's; the same selfish carelessness of a man whom the idea of paternity irritates.

She was seized by an excruciating pain, a spasm so agonizing that she thought, "I am going to die! I am dying!" And her soul was filled with a furious hatred; she felt she must curse this man who was the cause of all her agony, and this child which was killing her. She strained every muscle in a supreme effort to rid herself of this awful burden, and then it felt as if her whole inside were pouring away from her, and her suffering suddenly became less.

The nurse and the doctor bent over her and were touching her. They took something away; and she heard the choking noise she had heard once

before, and then the low cry of pain, the feeble whine of the new-born child filled her ears and seemed to enter her poor, exhausted body till it reached her very soul; and, in an unconscious movement she tried to hold out her arms.

She was filled with a sudden joy, an impulse towards a new happiness just unfolded. In one second she had been delivered, soothed and made happier than she had ever been before, and her mind and body revived as she realised she was a mother.

She wanted to see her child. It had not any hair or nails, for it had come before its time, but when she saw this human larva move its limbs and open its mouth, and cry, and when she touched this wrinkled, grimacing, living monster her heart overflowed with happiness, and she knew that she was saved, guaranteed against despair, that there she had something she could love to the exclusion of all else.

From that time her child was her only care. She suddenly became a fanatical mother, all the more idolising because she had been so deceived in her love and disappointed in her hopes. She insisted on having the cot close to her bed, and, when she could get up, she sat by the window whole days rocking the cradle. She was jealous of the wet-nurse, and when the hungry baby held out its arms towards the big blue-veined breast, and seized the brown wrinkled nipple in its greedy lips, she would watch the placid peasant woman, pale and trembling, with a desire to snatch away her son, and strike and scratch the breast from which he drank so eagerly.

She embroidered fine robes for him herself, of

most elaborate elegance. He was surrounded by a cloud of lace and wore the handsomest caps. The only thing she could talk about was the baby's clothes, and she was always interrupting a conversation to hold up a band, or bib, or some especially pretty ribbon for admiration, for she took no notice of what was being said around her as she went into ecstasies over scraps of linen, twisting and turning them in her hands, and holding them up to see better. Then suddenly she would say:

"Don't you think he will look lovely in that?"

The Baron and his wife smiled at this excess of tenderness, but Julien, whose habitual routine had been interfered with and his overweening importance diminished by the arrival of this noisy and all-powerful tyrant, unconsciously jealous of this mite of a man who had usurped his place in the house, kept on saying angrily and impatiently: "How wearisome she is with her brat!"

She became so obsessed by this affection that she would pass the entire night beside the cradle, watching the child asleep. As she was becoming exhausted by this morbid life, taking no rest, growing weaker and thinner and beginning to cough, the doctor ordered the child to be taken from her. She got angry, wept, implored, but they were deaf to her entreaties. His nurse took him every evening, and each night his mother would rise, and in her bare feet go to the door, listen at the keyhole to see that he was sleeping quietly, did not wake up and wanted nothing.

Julien found her there one night as he was coming in late from dining at the Fourvilles, and after that

she was locked into her room every evening to compel her to stay in bed.

The christening took place about the end of August. The Baron was the godfather and Aunt Lison godmother. The child was baptised Pierre Simon Paul — Paul for everyday use. At the beginning of September Aunt Lison went quietly away, and her absence was as unnoticed as her presence had been.

One evening, after dinner, the priest called. He seemed embarrassed and had an air of mystery about him, and, after a few commonplace remarks, he asked the Baron and Baronne if he could speak to them in private for a few moments. They all three walked slowly down the avenue talking eagerly as they went, while Julien, feeling uneasy and irritated at this secrecy, was left behind with Jeanne. He offered to accompany the priest when he went away, and they walked off towards the church where the angelus was ringing. It was a cool, almost cold, evening, and the others soon went into the drawing-room. They were all dozing a little when Julien suddenly returned, red in the face and looking most indignant. Before he was well in the room, and without considering whether Jeanne was there or not, he shouted:

“Upon my soul you must be mad to go and give twenty thousand francs to that girl!”

They were all taken too much by surprise to make any answer, and he went on, bellowing with rage: “I can’t understand how you can be such fools! But I suppose you will keep on till we haven’t a sou left!”

The Baron, recovering himself, a little, tried to check his son-in-law:

"Be quiet!" he exclaimed. "Don't you see that your wife is in the room?"

"I don't care a damn!" answered Julien, stamping his foot. "Besides, she knows all about it. It is a theft to her disadvantage."

Jeanne had listened to her husband in amazement.

"Whatever is the matter?" she stammered.

Then Julien turned to her, expecting her to side with him, as the loss of the money would affect her also. He told her in a few words of the plan to arrange a marriage for Rosalie, and the gift of the farm at Barville, which was worth twenty thousand francs at the very least. And he kept on repeating:

"Your parents must be mad, my dear, raving mad! Twenty thousand francs! Twenty thousand francs! They can't be in their right senses! Twenty thousand francs for a bastard!"

Jeanne listened to him quite calmly, astonished herself to find that she felt neither anger nor sorrow at his meanness, but she was perfectly indifferent now to everything which did not concern her child. The Baron was choking with anger, and at last he burst out, with a stamp of the foot:

"Think of what you are saying. Really, this is too much! Whose fault is it that this girl has to have a dowry? Who is her child's father? No doubt you would abandon her altogether if you had your way!"

Julien gazed at the Baron for a few moments in silent surprise at this violence. Then he went on more quietly:

"But fifteen hundred francs would have been ample to give her. They all have children before they marry, so what does it matter whom they have them by? And then, if you give Rosalie a farm worth twenty thousand francs, apart from the injustice to us, everybody will see at once what has happened. You might, at least, have thought of what is due to our name and position."

He spoke in a calm, cool way as if he were sure of his logic and the strength of his argument. The Baron, disconcerted by this fresh view of the matter, could find nothing to say in reply, and Julien, feeling his advantage, added:

"But fortunately, nothing is settled. I know the man who is going to marry her and he is an honest fellow with whom everything can yet be satisfactorily arranged. I will see to the matter myself."

With that he went out of the room, wishing to avoid any further discussion, and taking the silence with which his words were received to mean acquiescence.

As soon as the door had closed after his son-in-law, the Baron exclaimed:

"Oh, this is more than I can stand!"

Jeanne, catching sight of her father's horrified expression, burst into a clear laugh which rang out as it used to do whenever she had seen something very funny:

"Papa, papa!" she cried. "Did you hear the tone in which he said 'twenty thousand francs!'"

The Baronne, whose smiles lay as near the surface as her tears, quivered with laughter as she thought of her son-in-law's furious face, and his

indignant exclamations and determined attempt to prevent this money, which was not his, being given to the girl he had seduced. Rendered happy by the good humour of Jeanne, finally the Baron caught the contagion and they all three laughed till they ached, as in the happy days of old. When they were a little calmer, Jeanne said:

"It is very funny, but really I don't seem to mind in the least what he says or does now. I look upon him quite as a stranger, and I can hardly believe I am his wife. You see I am able to laugh at his — his want of delicacy." And without knowing why all three kissed, smiling and close to tears.

Two days later, after lunch, when Julien had gone out for a ride, a tall, young fellow of about two- or five-and-twenty, dressed in a brand-new blue blouse, which hung in stiff folds, with puffed sleeves fastened at the wrists, climbed stealthily over the fence, as if he had been hiding there all the morning, crept along the Couillards' ditch, and went round to the other side of the château where Jeanne and her father and mother were sitting under the plane-tree. He took off his cap when he saw them and bowed awkwardly as he came towards them, and, when he was within speaking distance, mumbled:

"Your servant, Monsieur le Baron, Madame and company." Then, as no one said anything to him he introduced himself as "Desiré Lecoq."

This name failing to explain his presence, the Baron asked:

"What do you want?"

The peasant was very disconcerted when he found he had to state his business. He hesitated, stam-

mered, cast his eyes from the cap he held in his hands to the château roof and back again:

"His Reverence has said somethin' to me about this business —" then, fearing to say too much and thus injure his own interests, he stopped short.

"What business?" asked the Baron. "I don't know what you mean."

"About your maid — Rosalie," said the man in a low voice.

Jeanne, guessing what he had come about, got up and went away with her child in her arms.

"Come here," said the Baron, pointing to the chair his daughter had just left.

The peasant took the seat with a "Thank you, kindly," and then waited as if he had nothing whatever to say. After a considerable pause, he thought he had better say something, so he looked up to the blue sky and remarked:

"What fine weather for this time of year to be sure. It'll help on the crops finely." And then he again relapsed into silence.

The Baron began to get impatient.

"Then you are going to marry Rosalie?" he said in a dry tone, going straight to the point.

Immediately the man became uneasy, all the crafty, suspicious nature of the Normandy peasant on the alert. He answered quickly but cautiously:

"That depends. Perhaps I am and perhaps I ain't, that depends."

All this beating about the bush irritated the Baron.

"Confound it! Can't you give a straightforward answer? Have you come to say you will marry the girl or not?"

The man was perplexed and kept his eyes fixed on his feet.

"If it's as His Reverence says," he replied, "I'll have her; but if it's as M. Julien says, I won't."

"What did M. Julien tell you?"

"M'sieu Julien told me as how I'd have fifteen hundred francs; but His Reverence told me as how I'd have twenty thousand. I'll have her for twenty thousand, but I won't for fifteen hundred."

The Baronne was tickled by the perplexed look on the yokel's face and began to shake with laughter as she sat in her armchair. Her gaiety surprised the peasant, who looked at her suspiciously out of the corner of his eye as he waited for an answer.

The Baron who did not like all this haggling, cut it short.

"I have told M. le curé that you shall have the farm at Barville, which is worth twenty thousand francs, for life, and then it is to become the child's. That is all I have to say on the matter. Now is your answer yes or no?"

The man smiled with an air of humility and satisfaction, and became suddenly loquacious:

"Oh, then, I don't say no, that was the only thing that pulled me up. When His Reverence said somethin' to me about it in the first place, I said yes at once, 'specially as it was to oblige you who'd be sure to pay me back for it, as I says to myself. Ain't it always the way, and doesn't one good turn always deserve another? But M. Julien comes up, and then it was only fifteen hundred francs. Then I says to myself, 'I must find out the rights o' this and so I came here. Of course I b'lieved your word,

sir, but I wanted to find out o' the rights o' the case. Short reck'nings make long friends, don't they, sir?"

To stop him, the Baron asked:

"When will you marry her?"

The peasant became frightened directly and embarrassed. Finally he said hesitatingly:

"Couldn't I have it put down in writin' first?"

"Why bless my soul, isn't the marriage-contract good enough for you?" exclaimed the Baron, now really angry.

"But until I get that I should like it wrote down on paper," persisted the peasant. "Havin' it down on paper never does no harm."

"Give a plain answer, now at once," said the Baron, rising to put an end to the interview. "If you don't choose to marry the girl, say so. I know some one else who would be glad of the chance."

The idea of twenty thousand francs slipping from his hands into some one else's, startled the peasant out of his cautiousness, and he at once decided to say "yes":

He made up his mind, and held out his hand as if he were concluding the purchase of a cow.

"Put it there, sir. It's done, and there's no going back from the bargain."

The Baron took his hand and then shouted: "Ludivine." The cook appeared at the window.

"Bring a bottle of wine."

They drank to the bargain that had been concluded, and the peasant went off in an easier frame of mind.

Nothing was said about this visit to Julien. The marriage-contract was drawn up in secret; then,

once the banns were published, the marriage took place on a Monday morning. A neighbour carried the child to the church behind the bride and bridegroom, as an omen of good luck. None of the country people were surprised, and everyone thought Desiré Lecoq very fortunate. He was born lucky, said the peasants with a malicious smile, without resentment.

Julien made a terrible scene, which cut short the stay of his parents-in-law at Les Peuples. Jeanne saw them leave without very deep regret, for Paul had become for her an inexhaustible source of happiness.

IX.

JEANNE having now completely recovered from her confinement they determined to return the Fourvilles' visit, and also to call on the Marquis de Coutelier. Julien had just bought another carriage at a sale, a phaeton. It needed only one horse, so they could go out twice a month.

It was harnessed one bright day in December, and after driving for two hours across the Normandy plains they began to go down to a little valley, whose sloping sides were covered with trees, while the level ground at the bottom was cultivated. The ploughed fields were followed by meadows, the meadows by a fen covered with tall reeds, all dried up at this season, which waved in the wind like yellow ribbons. Then the valley took a sharp turn and the Château de la Vrilllette came in sight. It was built between a wooded slope on the one side and a large lake on the other, the water stretching from the château wall to the tall fir-trees which covered the opposite slope of the valley.

They had to pass over an old draw-bridge and under a vast Louis XIII. archway to reach the courtyard in front of a handsome building of the same period as the archway, with brick frames round the windows and slated turrets. Julien pointed out all the different beauties of the mansion to Jeanne as

if he were thoroughly acquainted with every nook and corner of it. He did the honours, going into raptures over its beauty:

"Just look at that archway! Isn't such a place superb? On the other side of the house, which looks on to the lake, there is a magnificent flight of steps leading right down to the water. Four boats are moored at the bottom of the steps, two for the Comte and two for the Comtesse. Down there, on the right, where you can see that row of poplars, the lake ends and the river, which runs to Fécamp, rises. The place abounds in wild-fowl, and the Comte passes all his time shooting. Ah! it is indeed a lordly residence."

The hall door opened and the pale Comtesse came to meet her visitors with a smile on her face. She wore a trailing dress like a *châtelaine* of olden days. She looked like some beautiful Lady of the Lake born to inhabit this noble manor.

Four out of the eight drawing-room windows looked on to the lake, and the gloomy fir-trees which covered the opposite slope. The sombre green made the lake look deep, austere and dismal, and when the wind blew the moaning of the trees seemed like the voice of the swamp.

The Comtesse took both Jeanne's hands in hers as if she had known her since childhood, placed her in a seat and then drew a low chair beside her for herself, while Julien, who had regained all his old refinement during the last five months, smiled and chatted in a tender, familiar way. The Comtesse and he talked about the rides they had had together. She laughed a little at his bad horsemanship, and

called him "The Tottering Knight," and he too laughed, calling her in return "The Amazon Queen."

A gun went off just under the window, and Jeanne gave a little cry. It was the Comte shooting teal. His wife at once called him in. There was the splash of oars, the grating of a boat against the stone steps and then the Comte came in, a huge figure in high boots, followed by two dripping dogs of a reddish hue, like himself, which lay down on the carpet before the door.

He seemed more at his ease in his own house, and was delighted to see the visitors. He ordered more wood for the fire, and Madeira and biscuits to be brought.

"Of course you will dine with us," he exclaimed.

Jeanne, who never ceased thinking of her child, refused the invitation, and as he pressed her to stay and she still persisted in her refusal, Julien made a movement of impatience. Then afraid of arousing her husband's quarrelsome temper, she consented to stay, though the idea of not seeing Paul till the next day was torture to her.

It was a delightful afternoon. First of all the visitors were taken to see the springs which flowed from the foot of a moss-covered rock into a crystal basin of water which bubbled as if it were boiling, and then they went in a boat among the dry reeds, where paths of water had been formed by cutting down the rushes.

The Comte rowed, his two dogs sitting one on each side of him with their noses in the air, and each vigorous stroke of the oars lifted the boat half out of the water and sent it rapidly on its way. Jeanne occa-

sionally let her hand trail in the water, enjoying the icy coolness, which penetrated from her fingers to her heart. Julien and the Comtesse, well wrapped up in rugs, sat in the stern of the boat, smiling eternally as people do whose happiness is complete.

The evening drew on, and with it the icy, northerly wind came over the withered reeds. The sun had disappeared behind the firs, and it made one cold only to look at the crimson sky, covered with tiny, red, fantastically-shaped clouds.

They all went in to the big drawing-room where an enormous fire was blazing. At the very threshold one felt an atmosphere of warmth and comfort, and the Comte gayly lifted up his wife in his strong arms like a child, and gave her two hearty kisses on her cheeks.

Jeanne could not help smiling at this good-natured giant; whose moustaches gave him the appearance of an ogre. "What wrong impressions of people one forms every day," she thought; and, almost involuntarily, she glanced at Julien. He was standing in the doorway, his eyes fixed on the Comte and his face very pale. His expression frightened her and, going up to him, she asked:

"What is the matter? are you ill?"

"There's nothing the matter with me," he answered, churlishly. "Leave me alone. I only feel cold."

When they went into the dining-room the Comte begged permission for his dogs to come in. They came and sat one on each side of their master, who every minute threw them some scrap of food, and tickled their silky ears. The animals stretched out

their heads, and wagged their tails, quivering with pleasure.

After dinner, when Jeanne and Julien were preparing to go, the Comte insisted on their staying to see some fishing by torchlight. They and the Comtesse stood on the steps leading down to the lake, while the Comte got into his boat with a servant carrying a lighted torch and a net. The night was clear and bracing beneath a sky sown with gold. The torch cast strange trembling reflections over the water, its dancing glimmers lighting up the reeds and illuminating the curtain of firs. Suddenly, as the boat turned round, an enormous fantastic shadow was thrown on the background of the illumined wood. It was the shadow of a man, but the head rose above the trees and was lost against the dark sky, while the feet seemed to be down in the lake. This huge creature raised its arms as if it would grasp the stars. The arms rose suddenly and fell again, and the splash of water was heard.

The boat tacked a little, and the gigantic shadow seemed to run along the wood, which was lighted up as the torch moved with the boat; then it was lost in the darkness, then reappeared on the château wall, smaller, but more distinct; and the loud voice of the Comte was heard exclaiming:

"Gilberte, I have caught eight!"

The oars splashed, and the enormous shadow remained standing in the same place on the wall, but gradually it became thinner and shorter; the head seemed to sink lower and the body to get narrower, and when M. de Fourville came up the steps, followed by the servant carrying the torch, it was reduced to

his exact proportions, and faithfully copied all his movements. In the net he had eight big fish which were still quivering.

As Jeanne and Julien were driving home, well wrapped up in cloaks and rugs which the Fourvilles had lent them, she said, almost involuntarily:

"What a good-hearted man that giant is!"

"Yes," answered Julien, who was drowsy; "but he does not always restrain his affection before people."

A week later they called on the Couteliers, who were supposed to be the highest family in the province, and whose estate lay near the town of Cany. The new château, built in the reign of Louis XIV., lay in a magnificent park, entirely surrounded by walls, and the ruins of the old château could be seen from the higher parts of the grounds.

A liveried servant showed the visitors into a large, handsome room. In the middle of the floor an enormous Sèvres vase stood on a column, and in the pedestal, under glass, was the king's autograph letter, offering this royal gift to the Marquis Léopold Hervé Joseph Germer de Varneville, de Rollebosc de Coutelier. Jeanne and Julien were looking at this regal present when the Marquis and Marquise came in.

The Marquise, who was powdered, thought her rank constrained her to be amiable, and her desire to appear condescending made her affected. Her husband was a big man, with white hair brushed straight up all over his head, and a haughtiness in his voice, in all his movements, in his every attitude which plainly showed his importance. They were ceremonious people whose minds, whose feelings, whose words alike seemed stilted.

They both talked on without waiting for an answer, smiled with an air of indifference, and behaved as if they were accomplishing a duty imposed upon them by their superior birth, in receiving the smaller nobles of the province with such politeness. Jeanne and Julien tried to make themselves agreeable, though they felt ill at ease, and when the time came to conclude their visit they hardly knew how to retire, though they did not want to stay any longer. However, the Marquise, herself, ended the visit naturally and simply by stopping short the conversation, like a queen ending an audience.

"I don't think we will call on anyone else, unless you want to," said Julien, as they were going back. "The Fourvilles are quite as many friends as I want."

And Jeanne agreed with him.

December slowly passed, that dark month, a gloomy gap at the end of the year. The confined life of the previous winter began again, but Jeanne did not feel dull; her thoughts were too full of Paul, whom Julien looked at surreptitiously with an uneasy, dissatisfied air. She would hold him in her arms, covering him with those passionate kisses which mothers lavish on their children, then offering the baby's face to his father:

"Why don't you kiss him?" she would say. "You hardly seem to love him."

Julien would just touch the infant's smooth forehead with his lips, holding his body as far away as possible, as if he were afraid of the little hands touching him in their aimless movements. Then

he would go quickly out of the room, almost as though the child disgusted him.

The mayor, the doctor, and the priest came to dinner occasionally, and sometimes the Fourvilles, with whom they had become very intimate. The Comte seemed to worship Paul. He nursed the child on his knees during the whole of their visits, sometimes holding him the whole afternoon. He touched him delicately with his huge hands. He would tickle the child's nose with the ends of his long moustaches, and then suddenly cover his face with kisses almost as passionate as a mother's. It was the great trouble of his life that he had no children.

March was bright, dry, and almost mild. The Comtesse Gilberte again proposed that they should all four go for some rides together, and Jeanne, a little tired of the long, weary evenings and the dull, monotonous days, was only too pleased at the idea and agreed to it at once. And for a week she amused herself making her riding habit. Then they commenced their rides.

They always rode two and two, the Comtesse and Julien leading the way, and the Comte and Jeanne about a hundred feet behind. The latter couple talked quietly like two friends, as they rode along, for, each attracted by the other's straightforward ways and kindly heart, they had become fast friends. The others talked in whispers alternated by noisy bursts of laughter, and looked into each other's eyes to read there the things their lips did not utter, and often they would break into a gallop, as if impelled by a desire to escape away, far away.

Sometimes it seemed as if something irritated

Gilberte. Her sharp tones would be borne on the breeze to the ears of the couple loitering behind, and the Comte would say to Jeanne, with a smile:

"My wife does not always get out of bed on the right side."

One evening, as they were returning home, the Comtesse began to spur her mare, and then pull her in with sudden jerks on the rein.

"Take care, or she'll run away with you," said Julien two or three times.

"So much the worse for me; it's nothing to do with you," she replied, in such cold, hard tones that the clear words rang out over the fields as if they were actually floating in the air.

The mare reared, kicked, and foamed at the mouth, and the Comte cried out anxiously:

"Do take care what you are doing, Gilberte!"

Then, in a fit of defiance, for she was in one of those nervous moods that nothing can check, she brought her whip heavily down between the animal's ears. It reared, beat the air with its forelegs for a moment, then, with a tremendous bound, set off over the plain at the top of its speed. First it crossed a meadow, then some ploughed fields, kicking up the damp, heavy soil behind it, and going at such a speed that in a few moments the others could hardly distinguish the Comtesse from her horse.

Julien stood stock still, crying: "Madame! Madame!" The Comte gave a groan, and, bending down over his powerful steed, galloped after his wife. He encouraged his steed with voice and hand, urged it on with whip and spur, and it seemed as though he carried the big animal between his legs,

and raised it from the ground at every leap it took. The horse went at an inconceivable speed, keeping a straight line regardless of all obstacles; and Jeanne could see the two outlines of the husband and wife diminish and fade in the distance, till they vanished altogether, like two birds chasing each other till they are lost to sight beyond the horizon.

Julien walked his horse up to his wife, murmuring angrily: "She is mad to-day." And they both went off after their friends, who were hidden in a dip in the plain. In about a quarter of an hour they saw them coming back, and soon they came up to them.

The Comte, looking red, hot, happy and triumphant, was leading his wife's horse. She was very pale; her features looked drawn and contracted, and she leant on her husband's shoulder as if she were going to faint. That day Jeanne understood how madly the Comte loved his wife.

All through the following month the Comtesse was merrier than she had ever been before. She came to Les Peuples as often as she could, and was always laughing and jumping up to kiss Jeanne. She seemed to have found some unknown source of happiness, and her husband simply worshiped her now, following her about with his eyes and seeking every pretext for touching her hand or her dress in an increase of passionate affection.

"We are happy now," he said, one evening, to Jeanne. "Gilberte has never been so nice as she is now; nothing seems to vex her or make her angry. Until lately I was never quite sure that she loved me, but now I know she does."

Julien had changed for the better also; he had become gay and good-temperd, and their friendship seemed to have brought peace and happiness to both families.

The spring was exceptionally early and warm. From the mild mornings until the calm, warm evenings, the sun helped the earth to germinate. There was a sudden and powerful burgeoning of all life simultaneously, one of those irresistible bursts of sap, that ardour of rebirth which nature sometimes shows in favoured years when the world seems to have grown young again.

Jeanne felt a vague excitement in the presence of this fermentation of life. She would be suddenly moved by a little flower in the grass. She gave way to a sweet melancholy and spent hours languidly dreaming. All the tender incidents of her first hours of love came back to her. Not that any renewal of affection for her husband stirred her heart; *that* had been completely destroyed; destroyed forever; but her whole body, fanned by the breezes, filled with the perfume of spring, was troubled, as if drawn by an invisible and tender appeal. She liked to be alone, and in the warm sunshine, to enjoy these vague, peaceful sensations which aroused no thoughts.

One morning as she was thus dreaming, suddenly she saw in her mind that sunlit space in the little wood near Étretat where for the first time she had felt thrilled by the presence of the man who loved her then, where he had for the first time timidly hinted at his hopes, and where she had believed that she was going to realise the radiant future of her

dreams. She thought she should like to make a romantic, superstitious pilgrimage to the wood, and she felt as if a visit to that spot would in some way alter the course of her life.

Julien had gone out at daybreak, she did not know whither, so she ordered the Martins' little white horse, which she sometimes rode, to be saddled, and set off.

It was one of those calm days when there is not a leaf nor a blade of grass stirring. Everything seemed motionless for all eternity, as through the wind were dead, even the insects seemed to have disappeared. A burning, steady heat descended from the sun in a golden mist, and Jeanne walked her horse along, enjoying the stillness, and every now and then looking up at a tiny white cloud, like a speck of cotton, a flake of vapour forgotten there in the midst of the bright blue sky. She went down into the valley leading to the sea, between the two great arches which are called the gates of Etretat, and went slowly towards the wood.

The sunlight poured down through the foliage which, as yet, was not very thick, and Jeanne wandered along the little paths unable to find the spot where she had sat with Julien. She turned into a long alley and, at the other end of it, saw two saddle-horses fastened to a tree; she recognized them at once; they were Gilberte's and Julien's. Tired of being alone and pleased at this unexpected meeting, she trotted quickly up to them, and when she reached the two animals, which were waiting quietly as if accustomed to stand like this, she called aloud. There was no answer.³⁴

On the trampled grass lay a woman's glove and two whips. They had evidently sat down and then gone farther on, leaving the horses tied to the tree. She waited fifteen or twenty minutes surprised and wondering what they could be doing. As she had got off her horse, she leant against the trunk of a tree and stood quite motionless. Without seeing her two little birds flew down on to the grass close by her. One of them hopped round the other, fluttering his outstretched wings, and chirping and nodding his little head; all at once they coupled. Jeanne watched them, as surprised as if she had never known of such a thing before; then she thought: "Oh, of course! It is springtime."

Then came another thought — a suspicion. She looked again at the glove, the whips and the two horses standing riderless; then she sprang on her horse with an intense longing to leave this place. She started back to Les Peuples at a gallop. Her brain was busy reasoning, connecting different incidents and thinking it all out.

How was it that she had never noticed anything, had never guessed this before? How was it that Julien's frequent absence from home, his return to his former elegance, his better temper had told her nothing? Now she understood Gilberte's nervous irritability, her exaggerated affection for herself and the bliss in which she had appeared to be living lately, and which had so pleased the Comte.

She pulled up her horse to a walking pace, for she wanted to think calmly, and the quick movement confused her ideas. After the first shock she became almost indifferent; she felt neither jealousy nor

hatred, only contempt. She did not think about Julien at all, for nothing that he could do would have astonished her, but the twofold treachery of the Comtesse, her friend revolted her. So everyone was treacherous, and untrue and faithless! Her eyes filled with tears, for sometimes one weeps over an illusion as bitterly as over the death of a friend. She resolved to pretend she knew nothing. Her heart would be dead to everyone but Paul and her parents, but she would bear a smiling face.

When she reached home she caught up her son in her arms, carried him to her room and pressed her lips to his face again and again, and for a whole hour she played with and caressed him.

Julien came in to dinner. He was charming and good-humoured and full of great intentions.

"Won't your father and mother come and stay with us this year?" he said.

She was so grateful for this kindness that she almost pardoned what she had seen in the wood. She longed to see the two people she loved best after Paul, and she passed the whole evening in writing to them and urging them to come as soon as possible.

They wrote to say they would come on the twentieth of May; it was then the seventh and she awaited their arrival with intense impatience. Besides her natural affection, she felt a renewed desire to have near her two honest hearts, to talk freely to decent people innocent of vileness, whose life and every action, thought and desire had always been upright and pure. She felt she stood alone in her honesty among all this guilt. She had learnt to dissimulate her feelings, to meet the Comtesse with

an outstretched hand and a smiling face, but her sense of desolation increased, of contempt for her fellow-men. Every day some village scandal reached her ears which filled her with still greater disgust and scorn for human frailty.

The Couillards' daughter had just had a child and was therefore going to be married. The Martins' servant, who was an orphan, a little girl only fifteen years old, who lived near, and a widow, a lame, poverty-stricken woman who was so horribly dirty that she had been nicknamed *La Crotte*, were all pregnant; and one was continually hearing of another pregnancy, or of the misconduct of some girl, some married woman with a family, or of some rich and respected farmer.

This warm spring seemed to revive the passions of mankind as it revived the plants; and to Jeanne, whose senses were dead, and whose wounded heart and romantic soul were alone stirred by the warm springtide breezes, and who only dreamed of the poetic side of love, these bestial desires were revolting and hateful. The mating of human couples irritated her as something contrary to the laws of nature, and she was angry with Gilberte, not for having robbed her of her husband, but for having bespattered herself with this filth. She was not of the same class as the peasants, who could not resist their brutal desires; then how could she have fallen like these brutes?

The very day that her parents were to arrive, Julien increased his wife's disgust by telling her laughingly, as though it were something quite natural and very funny, that the baker having

heard a noise in his oven the day before, which was not baking day, had gone to see what it was, and instead of finding the stray cat he expected to see, had surprised his wife, "who was certainly not putting bread into the oven." "The baker closed the mouth of the oven," went on Julien, "and they would have been suffocated if the baker's little boy, who had seen his mother go into the oven with the blacksmith, had not told the neighbours what was going on." Julien laughed as he added, "That will give a nice flavour to the bread. It is just like a tale of La Fontaine's."

For some time after that Jeanne could not touch bread.

When the post-chaise drew up before the door with the Baron's smiling face looking out of the window, the young woman felt a profound emotion fill her whole being, a violent burst of affection such as she had never felt before; but when she saw her mother she was shocked and almost fainted. The Baronne looked ten years older than when she had left Les Peuples six months before. Her huge, flabby cheeks were suffused with blood, her eyes had a glazed look, and she could not move a step unless she was supported on either side; her shortness of breath was now a wheezing and she breathed with such difficulty that it hurt one to hear her.

The Baron, who had seen her every day, had not noticed the change, and if she had complained or said her breathing and the heavy feeling about her heart were getting worse, he had answered:

"Oh, no, my dear. You have always been like this."

Jeanne went to her own room and cried bitterly when she had taken her parents upstairs. Then she went to her father and, throwing herself in his arms, said, with her eyes still full of tears:

"Oh, how changed mother is! What is the matter with her? Do tell me what is the matter with her?"

"Do you think she is changed?" asked the Baron in surprise. "It must be your fancy. You know I have been with her all this time, and to me she seems just the same as she has always been; she is not any worse."

"Your mother is in a bad way," said Julien to his wife that evening. "I don't think she's good for much now." And when Jeanne burst into tears, he lost his patience.

"Oh, good gracious! I don't say that she is dangerously ill. You always exaggerate. She is changed, that's all; it's only natural at her age."

In a week Jeanne had got accustomed to her mother's altered appearance and thought no more about it, thrusting her fears from her, as people always do put aside their fears and cares, with an instinctive and natural, though selfish, dislike of anything unpleasant.

The Baronne, unable to walk, only went out for about half an hour every day. When she had gone once up and down "her" avenue, she could not move another step and asked to be allowed to sit down on "her" seat. Some days she could not walk even to the end, and would say:

"Let us stop; my hypertrophy is too much for me to-day."

She never laughed as she used to; things which, the year before, would have sent her into fits of laughter, only brought a faint smile to her lips now. Her eyesight was still excellent, and she passed her time in reading *Corinne* and Lamartine's *Meditations* over again, and in going through her "Souvenir-drawer." She would empty on her knees the old letters, which were so dear to her heart, place the drawer on a chair beside her, look slowly over each "relic," and then put it back in its place. When she was quite alone she kissed some of the letters as she might have kissed the hair of some loved one who was dead.

Jeanne, coming into the room suddenly, sometimes found her in tears.

"What is the matter, mamma, dear?" she would ask.

"My relics have upset me," the Baronne would answer, with a long-drawn sigh. "They stir up pleasant memories which are all over now, and make me think of people whom I had almost forgotten. I seem to see them, to hear their voices, and it makes me sad. You will feel the same, later on."

If the Baron came in and found them talking like this, he would say:

"Jeanne, my dear, if you take my advice, you will burn all your letters — those from your mother, mine, everyone's. There is nothing more painful than to plunge into the memories of one's youth when one is old."

But Jeanne also kept all her old letters to form a "relic-box," although she differed from her mother

in everything else, obeying the heredity instinct for dreaming sentimentality.

A few days after his arrival, business called the Baron away again. The Baronne soon began to get better, and Jeanne, forgetting Julien's infidelity and Gilberte's treachery, was almost perfectly happy. The weather was splendid. Mild, starlit nights followed the soft evenings, and glorious days began with dazzling sunrises. The fields were covered with bright, sweet-smelling flowers, and the vast calm sea glittered in the sun from morning till night.

One afternoon Jeanne went into the fields with Paul in her arms. She felt an exquisite gladness as she looked now at her son, now at the flowery grass by the roadside, and every minute she pressed her baby closely to her and kissed him. Then, caressed by some sweet country perfume she felt like swooning, annihilated by infinite happiness. Then she thought of her child's future. What would he be? Sometime she hoped he would become a great man, famous and powerful. Sometimes she felt she would rather he remained with her, passing his life in tender devotion to his mother and unknown to the world. When she loved him with her selfish mother's heart, she wished him to remain simply her son; but when she listened to her passionate reason she hoped he would become something of importance in the world.

She sat down at the edge of a ditch and studied the child's face as if she had never really looked at it before. It seemed so strange to think that this little baby would grow up, and walk with manly strides, that these soft cheeks would become bearded, and the feeble murmur change to a deep-toned voice.

A WOMAN'S LIFE

Some one called her, and, looking up, she saw Marius running towards her. Thinking he had come to announce some visitor, she got up, feeling vexed at being disturbed. The boy was running as fast as his legs could carry him.

"Madame!" he cried, when he was near enough to be heard. "Madame la Baronne is very ill."

She felt as if a douche of cold water had been poured down her spine, and ran back, her head in a whirl. From a distance she could see a little crowd standing under the plane-tree. She rushed forward and when the group opened she saw her mother on the ground, her head supported by two pillows, her face black, her eyes closed, and her chest, which for the last twenty years had heaved so tumultuously, motionless. The child's nurse was standing there; she took him from his mother's arms, and carried him away.

"How did it happen? What made her fall?" asked Jeanne, looking up with haggard eyes. "Send for the doctor immediately."

As she turned she saw the priest, who had heard about it somehow or other. He at once offered his services, and, turning up his sleeves, began to rub the Baronne with Eau de Cologne and vinegar; but this had no effect.

"She ought to be undressed and put to bed," said the priest.

The farmer, Joseph Couillard, old Simon and Ludivine were there, and with the Abbé's assistance they tried to lift the Baronne, but when they lifted her, her head fell backwards, and her dress, which they were grasping, gave way, her huge body

was so heavy and hard to move. Jeanne shrieked with horror. They had to lay the huge, flabby body on the ground.

They had to bring an arm-chair from the drawing-room and when they had placed her in it, they could at last carry her. They went slowly up the stone steps and then upstairs. When they reached the bedroom they placed her on the bed. The cook was undressing her as best she could when the Widow Dentu came in, as if, like the priest, she had "smelt death," as the servants said. Joseph Couillard hurried off for the doctor, and the priest was going to fetch the holy oil, when the nurse whispered in his ear:

"You needn't trouble to go, Monsieur le curé. I have seen too much of death not to know that she is gone."

Jeanne, in desperation, begged them to tell her what she could do, what remedies they had better apply. The priest thought that anyhow he might pronounce an absolution, and for two hours they watched beside the lifeless, livid body, Jeanne, wracked with anguish and grief, sobbing aloud as she knelt beside the bed. When the door opened to admit the doctor, she thought that with him came safety and consolation and hope, and she rushed to meet him, trying to tell him, in a voice broken with sobs, all the details of the catastrophe.

"She was walking — as she did every day — and she seemed quite well, better even — than usual. She had eaten some soup and two eggs for lunch, and — quite suddenly, without any warning she fell — and turned black, as she is now; she has not

moved since, and we have — tried everything to restore her to consciousness — everthing —”

She stopped abruptly for she saw the nurse making a sign to the doctor to intimate that it was all over. Then she refused to understand the gesture, and went on anxiously:

“Is it anything serious? Do you think there is any danger?”

He answered at last:

“I very much fear that — that life is extinct. Be brave and try to bear up.”

Jeanne opened her arms, and threw herself on her mother's body. Julien came in. He made no sign of grief or pity, but stood looking simply vexed; he had been taken too much by surprise to at once assume an expression of sorrow.

“I expected it,” he whispered. “I knew she could not live long.”

He drew out his handkerchief, wiped his eyes, knelt down and crossed himself as he mumbled something, then rose and attempted to raise his wife. She was clinging to the corpse, almost lying on it as she passionately kissed it; they had to drag her away for she was nearly mad with grief.

She was allowed to go back after an hour. Then every shadow of hope had vanished, and the room had been arranged as a death chamber. Julien and the priest were standing near one of the windows, talking in whispers. The Widow Dentu was seated comfortably in an arm-chair, as one accustomed to watching by corpses, and who feels at home in a house where death has entered, and she seemed to be already dozing. Night was falling.

The priest went to meet Jeanne as she came into the room, and taking both her hands in his, he poured an unctuous stream of pious consolation into this inconsolable heart. He spoke of the dead woman in sacerdotal phrases, and, with the assumed sadness of the priest for whom death is a windfall, he offered to pass the night in prayers beside the body.

But Jeanne refused this offer as well as she could for her tears. She wanted to be alone, quite alone, with her mother this last night.

"That cannot be," interposed Julien; "we will watch beside her together."

She shook her head, unable to speak for some moments; then she said:

"She was my mother, and I want to watch beside her alone."

"Let her do as she wants," whispered the doctor; "the nurse can stay in the next room," and Julien and the priest, thinking of their night's rest, gave in.

Then the Abbé Picot knelt down, prayed for a few moments, then rose and went out of the room, saying, "She was a saintly woman," in the same tone as he always said, "*Dominus vobiscum.*"

"Won't you have some dinner?" asked the Vicomte in a perfectly ordinary voice.

Jeanne, not thinking he was speaking to her, made no answer.

"You would feel much better if you would eat something," he went on again.

"Let some one go for papa, directly," she answered distractedly; and he went out of the room to dispatch a mounted messenger to Rouen.

She remained in a sort of stupor of grief, as if she were waiting to give way to her passion of regret until she should be alone with her mother. The room became filled with shadows. The Widow Dentu moved noiselessly about, finding and arranging things in the dark, with the silent movement of a sick nurse. Then she lit two candles which she placed at the head of the bed on a small table covered with a white cloth. Jeanne seemed unconscious of everything; she was waiting until she should be alone.

When he had dined, Julien came upstairs again and asked for the second time:

"Won't you have something to eat?"

His wife shook her head, and he sat down looking more resigned than sad, and did not say anything more. They all three sat apart from one another; the nurse dropped off to sleep every now and then, snored for a little while, then awoke with a start. After some time Julien rose and went over to his wife.

"Do you still want to be left alone?" he asked.

She involuntarily seized his hand in hers: "Oh, yes; do leave me."

He kissed her on the forehead, whispered, "I shall come and see you from time to time," then went away with the Widow Dentu, who wheeled her arm-chair into the next room.

Jeanne closed the door and opened both windows wide. A warm breeze, laden with the sweet smell of the hay, blew into the room, and on the lawn, which had been mown the day before, she could see the heaps of dry grass lying in the moonlight. This pleasant sensation hurt her, striking her as an irony.

She returned to the bed, took one of the cold, still hands, and gazed at her mother.

She was no longer swollen as she was at the time of the attack. Now she seemed to be asleep, sleeping more peacefully than ever before, and the pale flame of the candles, stirred by the wind, changed the shadows on the face every moment as though it moved and she were alive again. Jeanne looked at her hungrily, and from the depths of her childhood memories arose. She remembered her mother's visits to the convent parlour, the way she used to hold out the bag of cakes to her; she thought of all her little ways, her affectionate words, the way she used to move, the wrinkles that came round her eyes when she laughed, the deep sigh she always heaved when she sat down, and all her little, daily habits, and as she stood gazing at the dead body she kept repeating, almost mechanically: "She is dead; she is dead," until at last she realised all the horror of that word.

The woman who was lying there — mamma — little mother — Madame Adelaide, was dead! She would never move, never speak, never laugh, never sit opposite her husband at the dinner table again, never say: "Good morning, Jeannette." She was dead. She would be enclosed in a coffin, placed beneath the ground, and that would be the end; they would never see her again. It could not be possible! What! She would have no mother!

This dear, familiar face, the first her eyes had seen, the first she had ever loved, this great reservoir of affection, this unique being, her mother, whose share of her heart was greater than that of all other

human beings — she was gone. She had only a few hours left to look at her face, motionless and unconscious; then nothing, nothing more, only a memory.

And she fell on her knees in a paroxysm of despair, her hands clutching the sheet, her face buried in the covers as she cried in a heart-rending tone: "Oh, mamma, my poor mamma!" Then feeling that she was losing her reason as she had done on the night when she fled across the snow, she rose and ran to the window to drink in the fresh air — the air which had not passed over the corpse or the bed on which it lay. The new-mown hay, the trees, the waste land and the distant sea lay peacefully sleeping in the tender moonlight. Something of this sweet calm entered into Jeanne and she began to weep slowly. Then she went back to her seat by the bedside and held her mother's dead hand in hers, as if she were watching by a sick-bed. Attracted by the lighted candles, a big, winged insect had entered through the open window and was flying about the room, dashing against the wall at every moment like a ball. Disturbed by its droning flight Jeanne looked up to see where it was, but she could only see its shadow moving over the white ceiling.

She ceased to hear it, and then, she noticed the regular ticking of the clock and another fainter noise, or rather an almost imperceptible rustling. It was the ticking of her mother's watch, which had been forgotten when her dress had been taken off and thrown at the foot of the bed. Suddenly a vague contrast between this little piece of mechanism still moving while her mother lay dead, sent a fresh pang of anguish through her heart. She looked

at the time. It was hardly half-past ten, and as she thought of the long night to come, she was seized with a horrible dread.

Other memories came back to her, those of her own life — of Rosalie, of Gilberte — of the bitter disillusionment of her heart. Life contained nothing but misery and pain, misfortune and death; there was nothing true, nothing honest, everything caused suffering and tears. Where could repose and happiness be found? In another existence, no doubt, when the soul had been delivered from its earthly trials. The soul! Her thoughts turned to this unfathomable mystery, seizing at once upon poetic theories which were immediately upset by others no less unreal. Where was her mother's soul now, the soul which had forsaken this still, cold body? Perhaps it was far away, floating in space. Where? Was it wandering like some invisible bird freed from its cage? Had it returned to God, or was it scattered among the new germs of creation? It might be very near; perhaps in this very room, hovering around the inanimate body it had left, and at this thought Jeanne fancied she felt a breath, as if a spirit had passed by her. She was frightened, horribly frightened, so that she dared not move, nor breathe, nor turn round to look behind her, her heart beating wildly as in a nightmare.

At that moment the invisible insect again commenced its flight around the room, knocking against the walls. Jeanne trembled from head to foot, then, as she recognised the buzzing she felt a little reassured, and rose and looked around. Her eyes fell on the *escritoire* with the sphinxes' heads, the

guardian of the "relics." As she looked at it a tender and curious thought came to her mind. It was to read over in this last watch, as though they were a prayer-book, the old letters that her mother loved. It seemed to her that she was about to perform a delicate and sacred, a really filial duty, which would give pleasure to little mother in the other world.

It was the correspondence of her grandfather and grandmother, whom she had never known. She wanted her hands to join theirs across the corpse of their daughter, to join them on this funeral night, as if they, too, were suffering, and form a mysterious chain of affection between those who had died so long ago and the woman who had but just joined them, and her child who was still on earth.

She got up and pulled down the lid of the little desk, and took from the lowest drawer about ten small packets of faded paper, carefully tied up and ranged in order. A refinement of sentimentality prompted her to place them all on the bed in the Baronne's arms; then she began to read.

They were old-fashioned letters with the perfume of another century about them, such as one finds in old family desks. The first commenced "My dearest"; another "My little darling"; then came some beginning "My pet" — "My beloved daughter," then "My dear child" — "My dear Adelaide" — "My dear daughter," varying as the letters had been addressed to the child, the young girl, and, later on, to the young wife. They were all full of foolish, loving phrases, and news about a thousand insig-

nificant, homely events, which, to a stranger, would have seemed trivial to mention: "Father has influenza; Hortense has burnt her finger; Croquerat, the cat, is dead; the fir-tree which stood on the right-hand side of the gate has been cut down; mother lost her prayer-book as she was coming home from church, she thinks some one must have stolen it," and they talked about people whom Jeanne had never known, but whose names she vaguely remembered hearing in her childhood.

She was touched by these simple details which seemed to reveal all her mother's past life and the inmost secrets of her heart to her. She looked at the corpse as it lay there, and suddenly she began to read the letters aloud, as though to console and gladden the dead woman; and the still corpse seemed happy. One by one she threw the letters on the foot of the bed, resolving to place them all in her mother's coffin as if they were flowers.

She untied another packet. These were in another handwriting, and began:

"I cannot live without your kisses. I love you madly."

There was nothing more, not even a signature. She turned the paper over, unable to understand it. It was addressed clearly enough to "Madame la Baronne Le Perthuis des Vauds."

She opened the next:

"Come to-night as soon as he has gone out. We shall have at least one hour together. I adore you."

Another:

"I have passed a night of anguish, longing for you in vain. I fancied you in my arms, your mouth quivering beneath mine, your eyes looking into my eyes. And then I could have dashed myself from the window, as I thought that, at that very moment, you were sleeping beside him, that he could love you when he wished."

Jeanne was perfectly bewildered. What did that mean? To whom, for whom, from whom were these words of love?

She went on reading, coming across fresh impassioned declarations, appointments with warnings as to prudence, and always at the end the six words: "Be sure to burn this letter!"

At last she came to an ordinary note, merely accepting an invitation to dinner; it was signed "Paul d'Ennemare," and was in the same writing. He was the man of whom the Baron still spoke as "Poor old Paul," and whose wife had been the Baronne's dearest friend!

Then into Jeanne's mind came a suspicion which at once changed to a certainty — he had been her mother's lover! With a sudden gesture of loathing, she threw from her all these odious letters, as she would have shaken off some venomous reptile, and, running to the window, she wept bitterly, with cries that wracked her breast in spite of her. All her strength seemed to have left her; she sank on the ground, and, hiding her face in the curtains to stifle her moans, she sobbed in an agony of despair.

She would have crouched there the whole night if the sound of some one moving in the next room had not made her start to her feet. Perhaps it was her father! And all these letters were lying on the bed and on the floor! He had only to come in and open one, and he would know all!

She seized all the old, yellow papers — her grandparent's epistles, the love letters, those she had not unfolded, those that were still lying in the drawer — and threw them all into the fireplace. Then she took one of the candles which were burning on the little table, and set fire to this heap of paper. A bright flame sprang up at once, lighting up the room, the bed and the corpse with a bright, flickering light and casting on the white bed-curtain a dark, trembling shadow of the rigid face and huge body beneath the sheet.

When there was nothing left but a heap of ashes in the bottom of the grate, Jeanne went and sat by the open window, as though now she dared not sit by the corpse. She began to cry again, and, hiding her face in her hands, she moaned out in heart-broken tones: "Oh, poor mamma! Poor mamma!"

Then a terrible thought came to her: Suppose her mother, by some strange chance, was not dead; suppose she was only in a trance-like sleep and should suddenly rise and speak! Would not the knowledge of this horrible secret lessen her love for her mother? Should she be able to kiss her with the same respect, and regard her with the same esteem as before? No! She knew it would be impossible; and the thought almost broke her heart.

The night wore on; the stars were fading, and a

cool breeze sprang up. The moon was slowly sinking towards the sea over which she was shedding her pearly light, and the memory of that other night she had passed at the window, the night of her return to Les Peuples, came back to Jeanne. Ah! how far away that was! How changed everything was, and what a different future lay before her! Over the sky crept a tinge of pink, a joyous, lovely, enchanting pink. She looked at it in surprise, as at some phenomenon, this radiant break of day, and asked herself if it were possible that, on a planet where such dawns were found, there should be neither joy nor happiness.

A noise at the door made her start. It was Julien. "Well," he said, "are you not very tired?"

She murmured, "No," happy at being no longer alone. "Go and rest now," he said. She kissed her mother a long, sad kiss; then she went to her room.

That day passed in attending to those melancholy duties that always surround a death; the Baron came in the evening, and cried a great deal. The next day the funeral took place. After she had pressed her lips to the clammy forehead for the last time, performed the final duties, and seen the coffin fastened down, Jeanne retired. The mourners were expected.

Gilberte arrived first, and threw herself into her friend's arms, sobbing violently. From the windows the carriages could be seen turning by the railings and driving up, and voices were heard in the hall. The room gradually filled with women in mourning, with whom Jeanne was not acquainted; then the Marquise de Coutelier and the Vicomtesse de Briseville arrived, and went up to her and kissed her.

She suddenly perceived that Aunt Lison was in the room, and she gave her such an affectionate embrace, that the old maid was nearly overcome. Julien came in dressed in deep mourning; he seemed very busy and very pleased that all these people had come. He whispered some question to his wife about the arrangements, and added in a low tone:

"It will be a very grand funeral; all the best families are here."

Then he went away again, bowing gravely to the ladies.

Aunt Lison and the Comtesse Gilberte stayed with Jeanne while the burial was taking place. The Comtesse repeatedly kissed her, murmuring: "Poor darling, poor darling," and when the Comte de Fourville came to take his wife home, he wept as if he had lost his own mother.

X.

THE next few days were very sad, those dull days in a house which seems empty because of the absence of a loved one who has gone forever, those days of suffering renewed each time one's hand encounters objects which the dead person constantly used. Every moment a memory strikes the heart and bruises it. There is the empty chair, the umbrella still standing in the hall, the glass which the maid has not yet washed. In every room there is something lying; the scissors, an odd glove, the book, whose pages are dog-eared from the touch of stiff fingers, the numberless other objects, which, insignificant in themselves, become a source of sharp pain because they recall so vividly a thousand little details, and one longs to flee anywhere else, to escape from this haunted house. But one must stay because others are there who remain and also suffer.

In addition, Jeanne was crushed by the pain of her discovery. The thought of it oppressed her and her wounded heart did not heal. The terrible secret increased her sense of desolation tenfold, for her confidence had been shattered with her only remaining belief.

Her father soon went away, to find relief from the grief which was deadening all his faculties in change of air and change of scene.

The old house, which witnessed every now and then the disappearance of one of its masters, resumed its quiet, regular existence.

Then Paul fell ill, and Jeanne nearly went mad. She remained for twelve days unable to sleep and scarcely touching food. The boy got well, but there remained the thought that he might die. What should she do if he did? What would become of her? Gradually there came a vague longing for another child, and soon she could think of nothing else, entirely possessed by her old desire to have about her a boy and a girl, and it became an obsession. But since Rosalie had been sent away, she had lived quite apart from Julien, and at the present moment it seemed utterly impossible to renew their former relations. Julien's affections were centred elsewhere; she knew that; and the mere thought of having to submit to his caresses again, made her shudder with disgust.

Still, she would have overcome her repugnance, so tormented was she by the desire of another child, but she did not know how to resume their marital relations. She would have died rather than let her husband guess what was in her thoughts, and he never seemed to dream of approaching her now. Perhaps she would have given up the idea had not each night the vision of a daughter playing with Paul under the plane-tree appeared to her. Sometimes she felt she *must* get up and silently join her husband in his room; twice, in fact, she did glide to his door, but each time she came back, without having turned the handle, her heart beating with shame.

The Baron was away, her mother was dead, and

now Jeanne had no one she could consult, to whom she could confide this delicate secret. She made up her mind, at last, to tell the Abbé Picot her difficulty, under the seal of confession. She went to him one day and found him in his little garden, reading his breviary among the fruit trees. She talked to him for a few minutes about one thing and another, then she faltered, with a blush: "Monsieur l'Abbé, I want to confess."

He put on his spectacles to look at her better, for he was astonished. "I don't think you can have any very heavy sins on your conscience," he said, with a laugh.

"No, but I want to ask your advice on a subject so — so painful to enter upon, that I dare not talk about it in an ordinary way," she replied, now thoroughly confused.

He dropped his jovial manner at once and assumed his priestly air.

"Very well, my daughter, come to the confessional, and I will hear you there."

But she suddenly felt a scruple at talking of such things in the quietness of an empty church.

"No, Monsieur le curé — after all — if you will let me — I can tell you here what I want to say. See, we will go and sit in your little arbour over there."

As they walked slowly over to the arbour she tried to find the words in which she could best begin. They sat down, and she commenced, as if she were confessing, "Father," then hesitated, said again, "Father," then stopped altogether, too ashamed to continue.

The priest crossed his hands over his stomach and waited for her to go on. "Well, my daughter," he said, perceiving her embarrassment, "you seem afraid to say what it is; come now, be brave."

"Father, I want to have another child," she said abruptly, like a coward throwing himself headlong into the danger he dreads.

The priest, hardly understanding what she meant, made no answer, and she tried to explain herself, but, in her confusion, she was at a loss for words.

"I am quite alone in life now; my father and my husband do not agree; my mother is dead, and — and — the other day I almost lost my son," she whispered with a shudder. "What would have become of me if he had died?"

She was silent. The priest looked at her in bewilderment. "There, there; come to the point," he said.

"I want to have another child," she repeated.

He was used to the coarse pleasantries of the peasants, who did not mind what they said before him, and he answered, with a smile and a knowing shake of the head: "Well, it seems to me that depends entirely on you."

She raised her clear eyes to his and said, hesitatingly:

"But — but — don't you understand that since — since that trouble with — the — maid — my husband and I live — quite apart."

Accustomed as he was to the promiscuity and easy morals of the peasants, this revelation astonished him. Then he thought he could guess what the young wife really wanted, and he looked at her out

of the corner of his eye, pitying her, and sympathising with her distress.

"Yes, yes, I know exactly what you mean. I can quite understand that you should find your — your widowhood hard to bear. You are young, healthy, and it is only natural; very natural."

He began to smile, carried away by the Rabelaisian temper of the country priest. "Besides, the Church allows these feelings, sometimes," he went on, gently tapping Jeanne's hands. "What are we told? That carnal desires may be satisfied lawfully in wedlock only. Well, you are married, are you not? You know what that means."

She, in her turn, had not at first understood what his words implied, but when his meaning dawned on her, her face became crimson, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh! Monsieur le curé, what do you mean? What do you think? I assure you — I assure —" and she could not continue for her sobs.

Her emotion surprised him, and he tried to console her.

"There, there," he said; "I did not mean to pain you. I was only joking, and there's no harm in a joke between decent people. But leave it all in my hands, and I will speak to M. Julien."

She did not know what to say. She wished, now, that she could refuse his help, for she feared his want of tact would only increase her difficulties, but she did not dare say anything.

"Thank you, Monsieur le curé," she stammered; and then hurried away.

A week passed. She lived in an agony of doubts

and fears. Then one evening, Julien watched her curiously all through dinner, with a certain smile on his lips, which she knew in his playful moods. He evinced towards her a gallantry which was faintly tinged with irony. After dinner they walked up and down the Baronne's avenue, and he whispered in her ear:

"Then we are going to be friends again?"

She made no answer, and kept her eyes fixed on the ground where there was a straight line, hardly visible now, as the grass had grown. It was the line traced by the Baronne's foot, which was gradually being effaced, just as her memory was fading, and Jeanne's heart felt swelling and bursting with grief; she seemed so lonely, so separated from everybody.

"For my part, I am only too pleased," continued Julien. "I was afraid of displeasing you."

The sun was setting; the air was mild. Jeanne longed to weep, to rest her head on some loving heart, and there whisper her sorrows. A sob rose in her throat. She threw herself into Julien's arms and wept. He looked at her head in surprise, unable to see her face, and he dropped a condescending kiss upon her hair, thinking she still loved him. Then they went indoors in silence and he followed her to her room and spent the night with her.

To him this renewal of their former relations was a duty, though hardly an unpleasant one, while she submitted to his embraces as a disgusting, painful necessity, and resolved to put an end to them forever, as soon as she was again pregnant. Soon however, she found that her husband's caresses were not as they used to be; they may have been more re-

fined, they certainly were not so complete. He treated her like a careful lover, instead of an easy husband. She was astonished, observed him and soon discovered that his caresses always stopped before conception was possible.

"Why do you not give yourself up to me as you used to do?" she whispered one night, her lips close to his.

"To keep you out of the family way, of course," he answered with a chuckle.

She started.

"Don't you wish for any more children, then?" she asked.

His amazement was so great, that, for a moment, he was silent; then:

"Eh? What do you say?" he exclaimed. "Are you in your right senses? Another child? I should think not, indeed! We've already got one too many, squalling and costing money, and bothering everybody. Another child! No, thank you!"

She clasped him in her arms, pressed her lips to his and murmured:

"Oh! I entreat you, make me a mother once more."

"Don't be so foolish," he replied, angrily. "Pray don't let me hear any more of this nonsense."

She said no more, but she resolved to trick him into giving her the happiness she desired. She tried to prolong her kisses, and threw her arms passionately around him, pressing him to her, and pretending a delirium of love she was very far from feeling. She tried every means to make him lose control over himself, but she never once succeeded.

Tormented more and more by her desire, driven to extremities, and ready to do or dare anything to gain her ends, she went again to the Abbé Picot. She found him just finishing lunch, with his face crimson, as he always had palpitation of the heart after eating. He looked up as she came in, and, anxious to hear the result of his mediation:

"Well?" he exclaimed.

"My husband does not want any more children," she answered at once without any of the hesitation or shamefaced timidity she had shown before.

The priest got very interested, and turned towards her, ready to hear once more of those secrets of wedded life, the revelation of which made the task of confessing so pleasant to him.

"How is that?" he asked.

In spite of her determination to tell him all, Jeanne hardly knew how to explain herself.

"He — he refuses — to make me a mother."

The priest understood at once; it was not the first time he had heard of such things, but he asked for all the details, and enjoyed them as a hungry man would a feast. Then he reflected for a few moments, and in calm tones, as if he were speaking of a good harvest, he drew up a plan of campaign, settling every detail.

"My dear child, the only thing you can do is to make your husband believe you are pregnant; then he will cease his precautions, and you will become so in reality."

Jeanne blushed to the roots of her hair, but, determined to be ready for every emergency, she argued:

"But — suppose he should not believe me?"

The priest knew too well the ins and outs of human nature not to have an answer for that.

"Tell everybody you are pregnant. When he sees that everyone else believes it, he will soon believe it himself. You will be doing no wrong," he added, to quiet his conscience for advising this deception; "the Church does not permit any connection between man and woman, except for the purpose of procreation."

Jeanne followed the priest's artful device, and, a fortnight later, told Julien she thought she was pregnant. He started up.

"It isn't possible! You can't be!"

She gave him her reasons for thinking so.

"Bah!" he answered. "You wait a little while."

Every morning he asked, "Well?" but she always replied: "No, not yet; I am very much mistaken if I am not pregnant."

He also began to think so, and his surprise was only equalled by his annoyance.

Well, I can't understand it," was all he could say. "I'll be hanged if I know how it can have happened."

At the end of a month she began to tell people the news, but she said nothing about it to the Comtesse Gilberte, for she felt an old feeling of delicacy in mentioning it to her. At the very first suspicion of his wife's pregnancy, Julien had ceased to touch her, then, angrily thinking, "Well, at any rate, this brat wasn't wanted," he made up his mind to make the best of it, and recommenced his visits to his wife's room. Everything happened as the priest had predicted, and Jeanne became pregnant. Then,

in a transport of joy, she took a vow of eternal chastity as a token of her rapturous gratitude to the distant divinity she adored, and henceforth closed her door to her husband.

She again felt almost happy, astonished at the ease with which her grief over the death of her mother had calmed down. She thought she was inconsolable, and now after barely two months that wound was healing, and all that remained was merely a vague melancholy, like the shadow of a great sorrow resting over her life. It seemed impossible that any other catastrophe could happen now; her children would grow up and love her; her old age would be calm and happy without her husband.

Towards the end of September the Abbé Picot came to the château, in a new cassock which had only one week's stains upon it, to introduce his successor, the Abbé Tolbiac. The latter was small, thin, and very young, with hollow, black-encircled eyes which betokened the depth and violence of his feelings, and a decisive way of speaking. The Abbé Picot had been appointed dean of Goderville. Jeanne felt very sad at the thought of his departure; he was connected, in her thoughts, with all the chief events of her life, for he had married her, christened Paul, and buried the Baronne. She liked him because he was always so good-tempered and unaffected, and she could not imagine Etouvent without the Abbé Picot's fat figure trotting past the farms. He himself did not seem greatly rejoiced at his promotion.

"I have been here eighteen years," he said, "and it grieves me to go to another place. Oh! this living is not worth much, I know, and as for the people

— well, the men have no more religion than they ought to have, the woman are not so moral as they might be, and the girls never dream of being married in church, until they have visited the shrine of Notre Dame du Gros Ventre, and orange blossoms are not worth much in these parts; still I love the place.”

The new priest had been fidgeting impatiently during this speech, and his face had turned very red.

“I shall soon have all that changed,” he said, abruptly, as soon as the other priest had finished speaking; and he looked like an angry child in his worn but spotless cassock, so thin and small was he.

The Abbé Picot looked at him sideways, as he always did when anything amused him.

“Listen,” he said. “You will have to chain up your parishioners if you want to prevent that sort of thing; and I don’t believe even that would be any good.”

“We shall see,” answered the little priest in a cutting tone.

The old priest smiled and slowly took a pinch of snuff. “Age and experience will alter your views; you will only estrange the last of the faithful. Folk believe hereabouts, but they do what they like. Beware. When I see a girl come to mass with a waist bigger than it ought to be, I say to myself — ‘Well, she is going to bring me another parishioner;’ — and I try to marry her. You can’t prevent them from going wrong, but you can find out the father of the child and prevent him forsaking the mother. Marry them, marry them, and don’t trouble yourself about anything else.”

“We will not argue on this point, for we should

never agree," answered the new priest, a little roughly; and the Abbé Picot again began to express his regret at leaving the village, and the sea which he could see from his windows, and the little funnel-shaped valleys, where he went to read his breviary and where he could see the boats in the distance. Then the two priests rose to go, and the Abbé Picot kissed Jeanne, who nearly cried.

A week afterwards, the Abbé Tolbiac called again. He spoke of the reforms he was bringing about as if he were a prince taking possession of his kingdom. He begged the Vicomtesse to communicate on all feast days, and to attend mass regularly on Sundays.

"You and I are at the head of the parish," he said, "and we ought to rule it, and always set it a good example; but, if we wish to have any influence, we must be united. If the Church and the château support each other, the cottage will fear and obey us."

Jeanne's religion was simply a matter of sentiment; she had merely the dreamy faith that a woman never quite loses, and if she performed any religious duties at all it was only because she had been so used to them at the convent, for the Baron's carping philosophy had long ago overthrown all her convictions. The Abbé had always been contented with the little she did do, and never scolded her. But when his successor did not see her at church on the previous Sunday, he had hastened to the château to question and reprimand her. She did not wish to quarrel with him, so she promised, inwardly resolving to go regularly only for a few weeks, out of good nature.

Little by little, however, she fell into the habit of frequenting the church, and, in a short time, she

was entirely under the influence of the delicate-looking, zealous and strong-willed priest. His ardour and enthusiasm appealed to her love of mysticism, and he seemed to make the chord of religious poetry, which she possessed in common with every woman, vibrate within her. His rigid austerity, his contempt for luxury and sensuality, his disdain for the things that usually occupy the thoughts of men, his love of God, his youthful, intolerant inexperience, his scathing words, his inflexible will made Jeanne compare him, in her mind, to the early martyrs; and she, who had already suffered so much, whose eyes had been so rudely opened to the deceptions of life, let herself be completely ruled by the rigid fanaticism of this boy who was the minister of Heaven. He led her to the feet of Christ the Consoler, teaching her how the holy joys of religion could alleviate all her sorrows, and, as she knelt in the confessional she humbled herself and felt little and weak before this priest, who looked about fifteen years old.

Soon he was detested by the whole country-side. With no pity for his own weaknesses, he showed a violent intolerance for those of others. The thing above all others that roused his anger and indignation was — love. He denounced it from the pulpit in crude terms, as is the practice of the Church, thundering out terrible judgments against concupiscence over the heads of his rustic audience; and, as the pictures he portrayed in his fury persistently haunted his mind, he trembled with rage and stamped his foot in anger. The grown-up girls and the young fellows cast sidelong glances at each other across the aisle; and the old peasants, who

A WOMAN'S LIFE

liked to joke about such matters, expressed their disapproval of the little priest's intolerance as they walked back to their farms after service with their wives in black capes and their sons in blue blouses. The whole country was in an uproar.

The priest's severity and the harsh penances he inflicted at confession were rumoured about, and, as he obstinately refused to grant absolution to the girls whose chastity was not immaculate, smiles accompanied the whispers. When, at the holy festivals, several of the youths and girls stayed in their seats instead of going to communicate with the others, most of the congregation laughed outright as they looked at them. He began to watch for lovers like a keeper on the look-out for poachers, and on moonlight nights he hunted up the couples along the ditches, behind the barns and among the clumps of rushes on the hillsides. One night he came upon two who did not cease their love-making even in his presence; they were strolling along a ditch filled with stones, with their arms round one another, kissing each other as they walked.

"Will you stop that, you rascals?" cried the priest.

"You mind yer own business, Father," replied the lad, turning round. "This ain't no business of yours."

Then the priest picked up some stones and threw them at the couple as he might have done at stray dogs, and they both ran off, laughing. The next Sunday the priest mentioned them by name before the whole congregation. All the young fellows soon ceased to attend mass.

The priest dined at the château every Thursday, but he very often went there on other days to talk to his penitent. Jeanne became as ardent and as enthusiastic as he, as she discussed supernatural things, using the old and complicated arsenal of religious controversy. They would both walk along the Baronne's avenue talking of Christ and the Apostles, of the Virgin Mary and of the Fathers of the Church as if they had really known them. Sometimes they stopped their walk to ask each other profound questions, which made them wander off into mystical divagations, and she would lose herself in cloudy, poetic arguments, while he, being more exact, would reason like a lawyer possessed with the mania of proving the possibility of squaring the circle.

Julien treated the new priest with great respect. "That's the sort of a priest I like," he was continually saying. "Half-measures don't do for him," and he zealously set a good example by frequently confessing and communicating. Hardly a day passed now without the Vicomte going to the Fourvilles, either to shoot with the Comte, who could not do without him, or to ride with the Comtesse regardless of rain and bad weather.

"They are riding-mad," remarked the Comte; "but the exercise does my wife good."

The Baron returned about the middle of November. He was changed, aged, faded, filled with a deep sadness which had taken possession of his mind. His love for his daughter seemed to have gained in strength, as if these few months of dreary loneliness had aggravated his need of affection, confidence and tenderness. Jeanne told him nothing about her new

ideas, her intimacy with the Abbé Tolbiac, or her religious enthusiasm, but the first time he saw the priest he felt an invincible dislike for him, and when his daughter asked him in the evening: "Well, what do you think of him?"

"He is like an inquisitor!" he answered. "He seems to me a very dangerous man."

When the Baron learnt from the peasants whose friend he was about the young priest's harshness and bigotry and the sort of war of persecution he waged against natural laws and instincts, his dislike changed to a violent hatred. He, the Baron, belonged to the school of philosophers who worship nature; to him it seemed something touching, when he saw two animals unite, and he was always ready to fall on his knees before the sort of pantheistic God he worshipped; but he shrank from the Catholic conception of a God, of bourgeois instincts, Jesuitical wrath and tyrannical revenge; a God, in fact, who seemed less to him than that boundless omnipotent nature, which is at once life, light, earth, thought, plant, rock, man, air, animal, planet, god and insect, because it is creation, stronger than human will and vaster than reason; that nature which produces all things without aim, without reason, or limit, in every shape and form throughout the universe, according to the exigencies of chance, and the presence of heat, to foster planetary life. Nature contained the germ of everything, and she brought forth life and thought, as trees bear flowers and fruit.

To him, therefore, reproduction was a great law of Nature, and to be respected as the sacred and divine act which accomplished the constant though

unexpressed will of this Universal Being; and he at once began a campaign from farm to farm against this intolerant priest who opposed the laws of life. It grieved Jeanne to the heart, and she prayed to the Lord, and implored her father, but he always answered:

"It is everyone's right and duty to fight against such men, for they are not like human creatures. They are not human," he repeated, shaking his long white hair. "They understand nothing of life, and they move in a harmful dream; they are contrary to Nature." And he pronounced "contrary to Nature" as if he were uttering a curse.

The priest had at once recognised in him an enemy, and, as he wished to remain master of the château and its young mistress, he temporized, feeling sure of victory in the end. By chance he had discovered the love affair of Julien and Gilberte, and his one idea was to break it off by no matter what means. He came to see Jeanne one day, and, after a long talk on the mystery of life, he asked her to unite with him in fighting against and destroying the wickedness which was in her own family, and so save two souls which were in danger. She asked him what he meant.

"The hour has not yet come," he replied; "but I will see you again soon," and with that he abruptly left her.

The winter was drawing to an end, a "rotten" winter, as the country people say, damp and mild. He came again in a few days, and spoke in vague terms of a disgraceful connection between people whose conduct ought to be irreproachable. It was

the duty, he said, of those who were aware of what was going on, to use every means to put an end to it. He used all sorts of lofty arguments, and then, taking Jeanne's hand, adjured her to open her eyes, to understand and to help him.

This time Jeanne saw what he meant, but terrified at the thought of all the trouble that might be brought to her home, which was now so peaceful, she pretended not to know to what he was alluding. Then he hesitated no longer, but spoke in terms there could be no misunderstanding.

"I am going to perform a very painful duty, but I cannot leave it undone. The office I hold forbids me to leave you in ignorance of the sin you can prevent. Learn that your husband cherishes a criminal affection for Madame de Fourville."

Jeanne bent her head in feeble resignation.

"What do you intend to do?" asked the priest.

"What can I do?" she murmured.

"Throw yourself in the way as an obstacle to this guilty love," he answered, violently.

She began to cry, and said in a broken voice:

"But he has deceived me before with a servant; he wouldn't listen to me; he doesn't love me now; he ill-treats me if I manifest any desire that does not please him, so what can I do?"

The priest, without making any direct answer, exclaimed:

"Then you bow before this sin! You submit to it! You consent to it! There is adultery under your own roof, and you tolerate it! The crime is being perpetrated before your eyes, and you refuse

to see it! Are you a Christian woman? Are you a wife and a mother?"

"What would you have me do?" she sobbed.

"Anything rather than allow this sin to continue," he replied. "Anything, I tell you. Leave him. Flee from this house which has been defiled."

"But I have no money," she replied. "And I am not brave now as I used to be. Besides, how can I leave without any proofs of what you are saying? I have not the right to do so."

The priest rose to his feet, quivering with indignation.

"You are listening to the dictates of your cowardice, Madame. I thought you were a different woman, but you are unworthy of God's mercy."

She fell on her knees:

"Oh! Do not abandon me, I implore you. Advise me what to do."

"Open M. de Fourville's eyes," he said, shortly. "It is his duty to end this *liaison*."

She was seized with terror at this advice.

"But he would kill them. And should I turn informer? Oh, not that! Never, never!"

He raised his hand as if to curse her, his whole soul stirred with anger.

"Live on in your shame and in your wickedness, for you are more guilty than they are. You are the wife who condones her husband's sin! My place is no longer here."

He turned to go, trembling all over with wrath. She followed him distractedly, ready to give in, and beginning to promise; but he would not listen to her and strode rapidly along, furiously shaking his

big blue umbrella which was nearly as high as himself. He saw Julien standing near the gate superintending the pruning of some trees, so he turned off to the left to reach the road by way of the Couillards' farm, and as he walked he kept saying to Jeanne:

"Leave me, Madame. I have nothing further to say to you."

Right in his road, in the middle of the farm-yard, a group of children, those of the house and some neighbour's children, were standing around the kennel of Mirza, the dog, looking curiously at something with silent and concentrated attention. In the midst of them stood the Baron, his hands behind his back, also looking on with curiosity. One would have taken him for a schoolmaster. When he saw the priest approaching, he moved away so as not to have to meet him and speak to him.

Jeanne said entreatingly: "Give me a few days, then return. I will tell you what I have been able to do, what I have arranged, and we can talk it over together."

By that time they had almost reached the group of children and the priest went to see what it was that was interesting them so deeply. It was the dog whelping; five little pups were already crawling round the mother, who gently licked them as she painfully lay on her side before the kennel, and just as the priest looked over the children's heads, a spasm seized the animal and a sixth appeared. When they saw it, all the youngsters clapped their hands with joy, crying:

"There's another! There's another!"

To them it was simply a perfectly pure and natural amusement, and they watched these pups being born as they might have watched the apples falling from a tree.

The Abbé Tolbiac stood still for a moment in horrified surprise, then, giving way to his passion, he raised his umbrella and began to rain down blows on the children's heads. The startled urchins ran off as fast as they could go, and he found himself left alone with the dog, which was painfully trying to rise. Before she could stand up, he knocked her back again, and began to hit her madly with all his strength. The animal moaned pitifully as she writhed under these blows, from which there was no escape as she was chained up. He broke his umbrella. Then, as his hands were empty, he jumped on her, and stamped and crushed her under foot in a perfect frenzy of anger. Another pup was born beneath his feet before he dispatched the mother with a last furious kick, and then the mangled body lay quivering in the midst of the whining pups, which were awkwardly groping for their mother's teats. Jeanne had run away, but the priest suddenly felt himself seized by the throat, a blow knocked his hat off, and the enraged Baron carried him to the fence and threw him out into the road.

When M. le Perthuis turned round, he saw his daughter kneeling in the midst of the pups, sobbing as she picked them up and put them in her skirt. He strode up to her gesticulating wildly.

"There!" he exclaimed. "There is the man in petticoats! What do you think of him now?"

The noise had brought the farm people to the spot, and they all stood round, gazing at the mangled dog.

"Could one have believed that a man would be so cruel as that!" said Couillard's wife.

Jeanne picked up the pups, saying she would bring them up by hand. They tried to give them some milk, but three died the next day. Then old Simon went all over the neighbourhood trying to find a foster-mother for the others; he could not get a dog, but he brought back a cat, asserting that she would do as well. Three more pups were killed, and the seventh was given to this nurse of a different race, who took to it directly, and lay down on her side to suckle it. That it might not exhaust its foster-mother the pup was weaned a fortnight later, and Jeanne undertook to feed it herself with a feeding-bottle; she had named it Toto, but the Baron rechristened it, and called it Massacre.

The priest did not return, but the next Sunday he hurled curses, threats and imprecations against the château, denouncing it as a plague-spot which ought to be removed, and going on to anathematise the Baron, who laughed at him, and to make veiled, half-timid allusions to Julien's latest amour. The Vicomte was annoyed at this, but he did not dare say anything for fear of giving rise to a scandal; and the priest continued to call down vengeance, in every sermon, and to foretell that the hour of the Lord was at hand, and that He would strike down His enemies. Julien wrote a decided, though respectful, letter to the archbishop, and the Abbé Tolbiac, finding himself threatened with disgrace, ceased his denunciations. He began to take long

solitary walks; often he was to be met striding along the roads with an ardent, excited look on his face. Gilberte and Julien were always seeing him when they were out riding, sometimes in the distance, on the other side of a common, or on the edge of the cliff, sometimes close at hand, reading his breviary in a narrow valley they were just about to pass through; they always turned another way to avoid passing him. Spring had come, enflaming their hearts with fresh desires, and urging them to seek each other's embraces in any secluded spot to which their rides might lead them; but the leaves were only budding, the grass was still damp from the rains of winter, and they could not, as in the height of summer, hide themselves amidst the undergrowth of the woods. Lately, they had generally sheltered their caresses within a movable shepherd's hut which had been left since autumn, on the very top of the Vaucotte hill. It stood all alone on the edge of the precipitous descent to the valley, five hundred yards above the cliff. There they felt quite secure, for they overlooked the whole of the surrounding country, and their horses, fastened to the shafts, waited until their masters were satiated with love.

One evening as they were leaving the hut, they saw the Abbé Tolbiac sitting on the hill-side, nearly hidden by the rushes.

"We must leave our horses in that ravine, another time," said Julien; "in case they should tell our whereabouts," and thenceforth they always tied their horses up in a kind of recess in the valley, which was hidden by bushes.

Another evening, they were both returning to La Vrillette where they were to dine with the Comte, when they met the priest coming out of the château. He bowed, without looking them in the face, and stood on one side to let them pass. For the moment his visit made them uneasy, but their anxiety was soon dispelled.

Jeanne was sitting by the fire reading, one windy afternoon at the beginning of May, when she suddenly saw the Comte de Fourville running towards the château at such a rate as to make her fear an accident had happened. She hastened downstairs to meet him, and when she saw him close, she thought he must have gone mad. He had on his shooting-jacket and a big fur cap, which he generally only wore on his own grounds, and he was so pale that his red moustaches, which, as a rule, hardly showed against his ruddy face, looked the color of flame. His eyes were haggard and stared vacantly or rolled from side to side.

"My wife is here, isn't she?" he gasped.

"No," answered Jeanne, too frightened to think of what she was saying; "I have not seen her at all to-day."

He sat down, as if his legs had no longer strength to support him, and, taking off his cap, he mechanically passed his handkerchief several times across his forehead; then he started to his feet, and went towards Jeanne with outstretched hands, and mouth opened to speak and tell her of his terrible grief. But suddenly he stopped short, and fixing his eyes on her, murmured, as if he were delirious: "But it is your husband — you also —"

and breaking off abruptly, he rushed out towards the sea.

Jeanne ran after him, calling him and imploring him to stop. "He knows all!" she thought, in terror. "What will he do? Oh, pray heaven he may not find them."

She could not reach him and he did not listen to her. He ran straight on without any hesitation, sure of his objective. He leaped across the ditch, and was rapidly striding across the reeds towards the cliff. Jeanne stood on the slope planted with trees, and watched him as long as he was in sight; then, when she could see him no longer, she went indoors again, tortured with fear and anxiety.

He had turned to the right and started to run. Threatening waves overspread the sea, big black clouds were scudding along madly, passing on and followed by others, each of them coming down in a furious downpour. The wind whistled, moaned, laid the grass and the young crops low, and carried away big white birds that looked like specks of foam, bearing them far into the land. The rain, which came in gusts, beat in the Comte's face and drenched his cheeks and moustaches, and the tumult of the elements seemed to fill his heart as well as his ears. There, straight before him in the distance, lay the Vaucotte valley, and between it and him stood a shepherd's hut, with two horses tied to the shafts, beside an empty sheep run.

What had they to fear in such a storm?

As soon as he caught sight of the animals, the Comte threw himself flat on the ground, and dragged himself along on his hands and knees, his hairy cap

and mud-stained clothes making him look like some monstrous animal. He crawled to the lonely hut, and, in case its occupants should see him through the cracks in the planks he hid himself beneath it. The horses had seen him and were pawing the ground. He slowly cut the reins by which they were fastened, with a knife that he held open in his hand, and, as a fresh gust of wind swept by, the two animals cantered off, their backs stung by the hail which lashed against the sloping roof of the shepherd's cot, and made the frail abode tremble on its wheels.

Then the Comte rose to his knees, put his eye to the slit at the bottom of the door, looked inside. He did not move and seemed to be waiting for something. Some time passed thus, and then he suddenly leapt to his feet, covered with mire from head to foot. Furiously he fastened the bolt, which secured the shelter on the outside, and seizing the shafts, he shook the hut as if he would have broken it to atoms. After a moment he began to drag it along — exerting the strength of a bull, and bending nearly double in his tremendous effort — and it was towards the almost perpendicular slope to the valley that he dragged the caravan and its human occupants. The latter were shouting and trying to burst open the door, in their ignorance of what had happened.

At the extreme edge of the slope, the Comte let go the hut, and it at once begun to run down the hill. Its speed increasing as it went, it moved quicker and quicker; its shafts bumped along the ground and it leaped over and dashed against obsta-

cles as if it were alive. It bounded over the head of an old beggar who was crouching in a ditch, and, as it passed, the man heard frightful cries issuing from within. Suddenly one of the wheels was torn off, and the hut turned over on its side, and began to roll over and over like a ball, or like some house uprooted from its foundations and hurled from the summit of a mountain. When it reached the edge of the last ravine it took a final leap, and after describing a curve, fell to the bottom, and smashed like an egg-shell.

Directly it had dashed upon the rocks at the bottom of the ravine, the old beggar, who had seen it falling, began to make his way down through the brambles. He did not go straight to the shattered hut, but, like the cautious rustic that he was, went to announce the accident at the nearest farm-house. The farm people ran to the spot, raised the wreckage, and found two bodies, bruised, mangled and bleeding. The man's forehead was split open, and his face crushed; the woman's jaw was almost separated from her head, and their broken limbs were as soft as if there had not been a bone beneath the flesh. Still the farmers could recognize them, and they began to make all sorts of conjectures as to the cause of the accident.

"What could they have been doin' in the cabin?" said a woman.

The old beggar replied that apparently they had taken refuge from the weather, and that the high wind had overturned the hut, and blown it down the precipice. He added that he himself was going to take shelter in it when he saw the horses fastened

to the shafts and concluded that the place was already occupied.

"If it hadn't been for that I should have been where they are now," he said with an air of self-congratulation.

"Perhaps it would have been all the better if you had been," said some one.

"Why would it have been better?" exclaimed the beggar in a great rage. "'Cause I'm poor and they're rich? Look at them now!" he said, pointing to the two corpses with his crooked stick, as he stood trembling and ragged, with the water dripping from him, his battered hat, his matted beard, and his long, unkempt hair. "We're all equal when we're dead."

The group had grown bigger, and the peasants stood round with a frightened, cowardly look on their faces. After a discussion as to what they had better do, it was finally decided to carry the bodies back to their homes, in the hope of getting a reward. Two carts were got ready, and then a fresh difficulty arose; some thought it would be quite enough to place straw at the bottom of the carts, and others thought it would look better to put mattresses.

"But the mattresses would be soaked with blood," cried the woman who had spoken before. "They'd have to be washed with *eau de javelle*."

"The château people'll pay for that," said a jolly-faced farmer. "The more damage is done, the more it will cost."

That decided the matter, and the two carts, perched on high wheels without springs, set off, one to the right, the other to the left, jolting and

shaking over the huge ruts the remains of these two beings who had so often been clasped in each other's arms, but who would never meet again.

As soon as the Comte had seen the hut rolling down the steep slope, he had fled away through the rain and the wind, and had run on and on across the country like a madman. He ran for several hours, across roads, over banks, and through hedges, and, at nightfall, he found himself at his own château. The servants were anxiously awaiting his return, and hastened to tell him that the two horses had just returned riderless, for Julien's had followed the other one.

M. de Fourville staggered back. "Some accident must have happened to them," he said in broken tones. "Let everyone go and look for them."

He started off again, himself, but, as soon as he was out of sight, he hid behind a bush, and watched the road along which the woman he still loved so dearly would be brought dead or dying, or perhaps maimed and disfigured for life. In a little while a cart passed by, bearing a strange load; it drew up before the château gates, then passed through them. Yes, he knew it was she; but the dread of hearing the horrible truth forced him to stay in his hiding-place, and he crouched down like a hare, trembling at the faintest rustle.

He waited for an hour — perhaps two — and yet the cart did not come back again. He was persuaded that his wife was dying, and the thought of seeing her, of meeting her eyes was such a torture to him, that, seized with a sudden fear of being dis-

covered and compelled to witness her death, he again set off running, and did not stop till he was hidden in the midst of a wood. Then he thought that perhaps she needed help and that there was no one to take care of her as he could, and he sped back in mad haste.

As he was going into the house, he met his gardener.

"Well?" he cried, excitedly.

The man dared not answer the truth.

"Is she dead?" almost yelled M. de Fourville.

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte," stammered the servant.

He experienced an intense relief at the answer; all his agitation left him, and he went quietly and firmly up the steps.

In the meantime, the other cart had arrived at Les Peuples. Jeanne saw it in the distance, and guessing that a corpse lay upon the mattress, understood at once what had happened; the shock was so great that she fell to the ground unconscious. When she came to herself again she found her father supporting her head, and bathing her forehead with vinegar.

"Do you know — ?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Yes, father," she whispered, trying to rise; but she was in such pain that she was forced to sink back again.

That evening she gave birth to a dead child — a girl.

She did not see or hear anything of Julien's funeral. In a few days she was conscious that Aunt Lison had returned and, in the midst of the feverish nightmares by which she was haunted, she strove

A WOMAN'S LIFE

to recall when, and under what circumstances, the old maid had last left Les Peuples. But even in her lucid moments she could not remember, and she could only feel sure she had seen her since her mother's death.

XI.

JEANNE was confined to her room for three months and everyone despaired of her life. Then, very gradually health and strength returned to her. Her father and Aunt Lison had come to live at the château, and they nursed her day and night. The shock she had sustained had entirely upset her nervous system; she started at the least noise, and the slightest emotion caused her to go off into long swoons. She had never asked the details of Julien's death. Why should she? Did she not already know enough? Everyone except herself thought it had been an accident, and she never revealed to any one the terrible secret of her husband's adultery, and of the Comte's sudden, fearful visit the day of the catastrophe.

And now she was filled with tender, sweet and melancholy recollections of the brief evidences of love shown her by her husband. She constantly thrilled at unexpected memories of him, and she seemed to see him as he was when they were betrothed and as she had known him in the hours of passion born beneath the sunlight in Corsica. All his faults diminished, all his harshness vanished, his very infidelities appeared less glaring in the widening separation of the closed tomb. And Jeanne, pervaded by a sort of posthumous gratitude

for this man who had held her in his arms, forgave all the suffering he had caused her, to remember only moments of happiness they had passed together. Then, as time went on and month followed month, covering all her grief and reminiscences with forgetfulness, she devoted herself entirely to her son.

He became the idol, the one thought of the three beings who surrounded him, and he ruled as a despot. A kind of jealousy even arose among his slaves. Jeanne watched with anxiety the big kisses he gave his grandfather after a ride on his knee, and Aunt Lison, neglected by him as she had been by every one else, and treated often like a servant by this little tyrant, who could scarcely speak as yet, would go to her room and weep as she compared the slight affection he showed her with the kisses he gave his mother and the Baron.

Two peaceful, uneventful years were passed thus in devoted attention to the child; then, at the beginning of the third winter, it was arranged that they should all go to Rouen until the spring. But they had hardly arrived at the damp, old house before Paul had such a severe attack of bronchitis, that pleurisy was feared. His distracted mother was convinced that no other air but that of Les Peuples agreed with him, and they all went back there as soon as he was well.

Then came a series of quiet, monotonous years. They spent all their time with the child, in the nursery, or the drawing-room or the garden, continually going into raptures over the way he lisped, or with his funny sayings and doings. Jeanne lovingly called him "Paulet," and, when he tried to

repeat the word, he made them all laugh by pronouncing it "Poulet," for he could not speak plainly. The nickname "Poulet" clung to him, and henceforth he was never called anything else. He grew very quickly, and one of the chief amusements of his "three mothers," as the Baron called them, was to measure his height. On the wainscoting, by the drawing-room door, was a series of marks made with a penknife, showing how much the boy had grown every month, and these marks, which were called "Poulet's ladder," were of great importance in everyone's eyes.

Then a new personage played an important part in the household — the dog Massacre, which Jeanne had neglected since all her attention had been centered in her son. Ludivine fed him, and he lived quite alone, and always on the chain, in an old barrel in front of the stables. Paul noticed him one morning, and at once wanted to go and kiss him. With many precautions he was taken there. The dog made a great fuss over the child, who cried when he was taken away, so Massacre was unchained, and henceforth lived in the house. He became Paul's inseparable friend and companion; they played together, and lay down side by side on the carpet to go to sleep, and soon Massacre shared the bed of his playfellow, who would not let the dog leave him. Jeanne lamented sometimes over the fleas, and Aunt Lison felt angry with the dog for absorbing so much of the child's affection, affection for which she longed, and which, it seemed to her, this animal had stolen.

At long intervals visits were exchanged with the

Brisevilles and the Couteliers, but the mayor and the doctor were the only regular visitors at the château.

Jeanne no longer went to church since the killing of the dog, and the suspicions the priest had instilled into her mind about the time of Julien's and Gilberte's horrible death, had roused her indignation against the God who could have such ministers. From time to time the Abbé Tolbiac inveighed in outspoken terms against the château, which, he said, was inhabited by the Spirit of Evil, the Spirit of Everlasting Rebellion, the Spirit of Error and of Lies, the Spirit of Iniquity, the Spirit of Corruption and Impurity; it was by all these names that he alluded to the Baron.

The church was deserted, and when he happened to walk past any fields in which the ploughmen were at work, the men never ceased their task to speak to him, or turned to touch their hats. He acquired the reputation of being a wizard because he cast out the devil from a woman who was possessed, and the peasants believed he knew words to dispel charms, which, according to him, were merely pranks of Satan. He laid his hands on cows that gave blue milk, or whose tails were twisted in a circle, and discovered the whereabouts of things which had been lost, by means of a mysterious incantation. He devoted his narrow, fanatical mind to the study of all the ecclesiastical books in which he could find accounts of the devil's apparitions upon earth, or descriptions of his resources and stratagems, and the various ways in which he manifested his power and exercised his influence.

Believing himself specially called to combat this invisible, harmful Power, the priest had learnt all the forms given in religious manuals to exorcise the devil. He fancied Satan lurked in every shadow, and the phrase *Sicut leo rugiens circuit, quærens quem devoret* was continually on his lips. People began to be afraid of his strange power; even his fellow-clergy, ignorant country priests to whom Beelzebub was an article of their faith, and who, perplexed by the minute directions for the rites to be observed in case of any manifestations of the Evil One's power, at last confounded religion with magic, regarded the Abbé Tolbiac as somewhat of a wizard, and respected him as much for the supernatural power he was supposed to possess as for the irreproachable austerity of his life.

He never bowed to Jeanne when he met her, and such a state of things worried and grieved Aunt Lison, whose timid old maid's mind could not understand how any one could systematically stay away from church. Everyone took it for granted that she was religious and confessed and communicated at proper intervals, and no one ever tried to find out what her views on religion really were. Whenever she was quite alone with Paul, Lison talked to him, in whispers, about God. The child listened to her with a faint degree of interest when she related the miracles which had been performed in the old times, and, when she told him he must love God, very, very dearly, he sometimes asked:

"Where is he, auntie?"

She would point upwards and answer: "Up there, above the sky, Poulet; but you must not say any-

thing about it," for she was afraid of the Baron. One day, however, Poulet startled her by asserting: "God is everywhere, but he is not in church," and she found he had been talking to his grandfather about his aunt's mysterious revelations.

Paul was now ten years old; his mother looked forty. He was strong, noisy, and boldly climbed the trees, but his education had, so far, been sadly neglected. He disliked lessons, would never settle down to them, and, if ever the Baron managed to keep him reading a little longer than usual, Jeanne would interfere, saying:

"Let him go and play, now. He is so young, you must not tire him."

In her eyes he was still an infant, of six months or a year, and she hardly noticed that he walked, ran, and talked like a little man. She lived in constant anxiety lest he should fall, or catch cold or overheat himself while playing, or overload his stomach, or not eat as much as his growth demanded.

When the boy was twelve years old a great difficulty arose about his first communion. Lise went to Jeanne's room one morning, and pointed out to her that the child could not be permitted to go any longer without religious instruction, and without performing the simplest sacred duties. She called every argument to her aid, and gave a thousand reasons for the necessity of what she was urging, dwelling chiefly upon the danger of scandal. The mother was disturbed, undecided and hesitating, and she replied that Paul could very well go on as he was for a little longer. A month later, when Jeanne

called on the Vicomtesse de Briseville, she chanced to say:

"I suppose it will be Paul's first communion this year."

"Yes, Madame," answered Jeanne, taken un-awares.

These few words decided her, and, without saying anything about it to her father, she asked Lise to take the child to the catechism class. Everything went on smoothly for a month; then Poulet came back, one evening, with a sore throat, and the next day he began to cough. His frightened mother questioned him as to the cause of his cold and he told her that he had not behaved very well in class, so the priest had sent him to wait at the door of the church, where there was a draught from the porch, until the end of the lesson. After that Jeanne kept him at home, and taught him the elements of religion herself; but the Abbé Tolbiac refused to admit him to communion, in spite of all Lison's entreaties, alleging, as his reason, that the boy had not been properly prepared.

The following year he refused him again, and the Baron was so exasperated that he said plainly there was no need for Paul to believe in such foolery as this absurd symbol of transubstantiation, to become a good and honest man. So it was resolved to bring the boy up in the Christian faith, but not in the Catholic Church, and that he should decide his religion for himself when he reached his majority.

A short time afterwards, Jeanne called on the Brisevilles and received no visit in return. Knowing how punctilious they were in all matter of etiquette, she felt very much surprised at the omission,

until the Marquise de Coutelier haughtily told her the reason of this neglect. Aware that her husband's rank and wealth made her the queen of the Normandy aristocracy, the Marquise ruled in queen-like fashion, showing herself gracious or severe as occasions demanded. She never hesitated to speak as she thought, and reproved, or congratulated, or corrected whenever she thought fit. When Jeanne called on her she addressed a few icy words to her visitor, then said in a cold tone: "Society divides itself naturally into two classes: those who believe in God, and those who do not. The former, however lowly they may be, are our friends and equals; with the latter we can have nothing to do."

Jeanne felt that she was being attacked and replied:

"But cannot one believe in God without attending church?"

"No, Madame. Believers go to pray to God in His church, as they would go to visit their friends at their houses."

"God is everywhere, Madame, and not only in the churches," answered Jeanne, feeling very hurt. "I believe in His goodness and mercy from the bottom of my heart, but when there are certain priests between Him and me, I can no longer realize His presence."

"The priest is the standard-bearer of the church, Madame," said the Marquise, rising, "and whoever does not follow that flag is as much our enemy as the Church's."

Jeanne had risen also. "You believe in the God of a sect, Madame," she replied, quivering with in-

dignation. "I believe in the God whom every upright man reveres," and, with a bow, she left.

Among themselves the peasants also blamed Jeanne for not sending Poulet to his first communion. They themselves did not go to mass, and never took the sacrament, or at least, only at Easter when the Church formally commanded it; but when it came to the children, that was a different matter, and not one of them would have dared to bring a child up outside the common faith, for, after all, "Religion is Religion."

Jeanne was quite conscious of this disapproval, and her soul revolted at all these compromises, these arrangements with one's conscience, these universal fears of everything, this great cowardice lurking in every heart, and showing itself under the mask of righteousness.

The Baron undertook to direct Paul's studies, and began to instruct him in Latin. The boy's mother had but one word to say on the subject, "Whatever you do, don't tire him," and, while lessons were going on, she would anxiously hang round the door of the schoolroom, which her father had forbidden her to enter, because, at every moment, she interrupted his teaching to ask: "You're sure your feet are not cold, Poulet?" or "Your head does not ache, does it, Poulet?" or to admonish the master with: "Don't make him talk so much, he will have a sore throat."

As soon as lessons were over the boy went into the garden with his mother and aunt. They were all very fond of gardening, and took great pleasure and interest in planting young trees in springtime,

in watching the seeds they had sown come up and blossom, and in cutting down branches, flowers for nosegays. Paul devoted himself chiefly to raising salad plants. He had the entire care of four big beds in the kitchen garden, and there he cultivated lettuce, endive, cos-lettuce, mustardcress, and every other known kind of salad. He dug, watered, weeded, and planted, and made his two mothers work like day labourers, and for hours together they knelt on the beds, soiling their hands and dresses as they planted the seedlings in the holes they made with their forefingers in the mould.

Poulet was growing up, he was almost fifteen; and the highest mark on the drawing-room wall was five feet from the ground, but in mind he was still an ignorant, foolish child, for he had no opportunity of expanding his intellect, confined as he was to the society of these two women and the good-tempered old man who was so far behind the times. At last one evening the Baron said it was time for the boy to go to college. Aunt Lison withdrew into a dark corner in horror at the idea, and Jeanne began to sob.

"Why does he want to know so much?" she replied. "We will bring him up to be a gentleman farmer, to devote himself to the cultivation of his property, as so many noblemen do, and he will pass his life happily in this house, where we have lived before him and where we shall die. What more can he want?"

The Baron shook his head.

"What answer will you make if he comes to you when he is twenty-five, and says: 'I am nothing,

and I know nothing through your fault, your selfish love. I feel incapable of working or of becoming any one now, and yet I know I was not intended to lead the dull, pleasureless life to which your shortsighted affection has condemned me.”

Jeanne turned to her son with the tears rolling down her cheeks.

“Oh, Poulet, you will never reproach me for having loved you too much, will you?”

“No, mamma,” promised the boy in surprise.

“You swear you will not?”

“Yes, mamma.”

“You want to stay here, don’t you?”

“Yes, mamma.”

“Jeanne, you have no right to dispose of his life in that way,” said the Baron sternly. “Such conduct is cowardly — almost criminal. You are sacrificing your child to your own personal happiness.” ✓

Jeanne hid her face in her hands, while her sobs came in quick succession.

“I have been so unhappy — so unhappy,” she murmured, through her tears. “And now my son has brought peace and rest into my life, you want to take him from me. What will become of me — if I am left — all alone now?”

Her father went and sat down by her side. “And am I no one, Jeanne?” he asked, taking her in his arms. She threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him fondly. Then in a voice still choked with tears and sobs:

“Yes, perhaps you are right, papa, dear,” she answered; “and I was foolish; but I have had so

much sorrow. I am quite willing for him to go to college now."

Then Poulet, who hardly understood what was going to be done with him, began to cry too, and his three mothers kissed and coaxed him and told him to be brave. They all went up to bed with heavy hearts, and even the Baron wept when he was alone in his own room, though he had controlled his emotion downstairs. It was resolved to send Paul to the college at Havre at the beginning of the next term, and during the summer he was more spoilt than ever. His mother moaned as she thought of the approaching separation and she got ready as many clothes for the boy as if he had been about to start on a ten years' journey.

One October morning, after a sleepless night, the two women and the Baron went off with Poulet in the landau. They had already paid a visit to fix upon the bed he was to have in the dormitory and the seat he was to occupy in class, and Jeanne and Aunt Lison passed the whole day in unpacking his things and arranging them in the little chest of drawers. As the latter would not contain a quarter of what she had brought, Jeanne went to the head master to ask if the boy could not have another. The bursar was sent for, and he said that so much linen and so many clothes were simply in the way, instead of being of any use, and that the rules of the house forbade him to allow another chest of drawers. The agrieved mother made up her mind to hire a room in a little hotel close by, and to ask the landlord himself to take Poulet all he wanted, directly the child found himself in need of anything.

They all went on the pier for the rest of the afternoon and watched the ships entering and leaving the harbour. Gloomy night descended on the city, which gradually lit up. They went to a restaurant for dinner. But they were not hungry, and the dishes were placed before them and removed almost untouched as they sat looking at each other with tearful eyes. After dinner they walked slowly back to the college. Boys of all ages were arriving on every side, some accompanied by their parents, others by servants. A great many were crying, and the big, dim courtyard was filled with the sound of tears.

Jeanne and Poulet clung to each other, while Aunt Lison stood, quite forgotten, in the background, with her face buried in her handkerchief. The Baron felt he too was giving way, so he hastened the farewells, and took his daughter from the college. The landau was waiting at the door, and they drove back through the night to Les Peuples. An occasional sob was heard in the darkness.

Jeanne wept the whole of the following day, and on the next she ordered the phaeton and drove over to Havre. Poulet seemed to have got over the separation already; it was the first time he had ever had any companions of his own age, and, as he sat beside his mother, he fidgeted on his chair and longed to run out and play. Every other day Jeanne went to see him, and on Sundays took him out. She felt as though she had not energy enough to leave the college between the recreation hours. She waited in the parlour, while the classes were going on, until Poulet could come to her again. At last the head master asked her to come and see him, and begged

her not to come so often. She did not take any notice of his request, and he warned her that if she still persisted in preventing her son from enjoying his play hours, and in interrupting his work, he would be obliged to dismiss him from the college. He also sent a note to the Baron, to the same effect, and thenceforth Jeanne was always kept in sight at Les Peuples, like a prisoner. She looked forward to the holidays with more impatience than her son. She was in a constant state of nervous anxiety, and began to take long walks about the country, with Massacre as her only companion, and would stay out of doors all day long, dreamily musing. Sometimes she sat on the cliff the whole afternoon watching the sea; sometimes she walked across the wood to Yport, thinking, as she went, of former walks whose memory haunted her. How far, far away was the time when she had gone over this country as a young girl, full of dreams.

Every time she saw her son, it seemed to her as if they had been separated for ten years; for every month he became more of a man, and every month she became more aged. Her father looked like her brother, and Aunt Lison, who had been quite faded when she was twenty-five, and had never seemed to get older since, might have been taken for her elder sister.

Poulet did not study very hard; he spent two years in the fourth form, managed to get through the third by the skin of his teeth, then spent two more in the second, and was nearly twenty when he reached the rhetoric class. He had grown into a tall, fair youth, with whiskered cheeks and a bud-

ding moustache. He came over to Les Peuples every Sunday now, instead of his mother going to see him; and as he had been taking riding lessons for some time past, he hired a horse and accomplished the journey from Havre in two hours.

Jeanne started out early in the morning to go and meet him on the road, and with her went Aunt Lison and the Baron, who was beginning to stoop, and who walked like a little old man, with his hands clasped behind his back as if to prevent himself from pitching forward on his face. The three walked slowly along, sometimes sitting down by the wayside to rest, and all the while straining their eyes to catch the first glimpse of the rider. As soon as he appeared, looking like a black speck on the white road, they waved their handkerchiefs, and he at once put his horse to the gallop, and came up like a whirlwind, frightening his mother and Aunt Lison, and making his grandfather exclaim, "Bravo!" in the admiration of impotent old age.

Although Paul was a head taller than his mother, she always treated him as if he were a child and still asked him, as in former years, "Your feet are not cold, are they, Poulet?" If he went out of doors, after lunch, to smoke a cigarette, she opened the window to cry: "Oh, don't go out without a hat, you will catch cold in your head"; and when, at night, he mounted his horse to return, she could hardly contain herself for nervousness.

"Do not ride too quickly, Poulet, dear," she would say. "Think of your poor mother, who would go mad if anything happened to you, and be careful."

One Saturday morning she received a letter from

Paul to say he should not come to Les Peuples as usual, the following day, as he had been invited to a party got up by some of his college friends. The whole of Sunday Jeanne was tortured by a presentiment of evil, and when Thursday came she was unable to bear her suspense any longer, and went over to Havre.

He seemed changed, though she could hardly tell in what way. He seemed more spirited, and his words and tones were more manly.

"By the way, mamma, we are going to have another party, and I shall not come to Les Peuples next Sunday, as you have come to see me to-day," he said, all at once, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

She felt as much surprised and stunned as if he had told her he was going to America; then, when she was again able to speak:

"Oh, Poulet," she exclaimed, "what is the matter with you? Tell me what is going on."

He laughed and gave her a kiss.

"Why, nothing at all, mamma. I am only going to enjoy myself with some friends, as everyone does at my age."

She made no reply, but when she was alone in the carriage, her head was filled with new and strange ideas. She had not recognized her Poulet, her little Poulet, as of old; she perceived for the first time that he was grown up, that he was no longer hers, that henceforth he was going to live his own life, independently of the old people. To her he seemed to have changed entirely in a day. What! Was this strong, bearded, firm-willed lad her son, her little

child, who used to make her help him to plant his lettuces?

For three months Paul only came to see his relatives at very long intervals, and even when he was there, it was only too plain that he longed to get away again as soon as possible, and that, each evening, he tried to leave an hour earlier. Jeanne imagined all sorts of things, while the Baron tried to console her by saying: "There, let him alone; the boy is twenty years old, you know."

One morning, a shabbily dressed old man, who spoke with a German accent, asked for "Matame la Vicomtesse." He was shown in, and, after a great many ceremonious bows, pulled out a dirty pocket-book, saying:

"I have a leetle paper for you," and then unfolded and held out a greasy scrap of paper.

Jeanne read it over twice, looked at the Jew, read it over again, then asked:

"What does it mean?"

"I vill tell you," replied the man obsequiously. "Your son wanted a leetle money, and, as I know what a goot mother you are, I lent him joost a leetle to go on vith."

Jeanne was trembling. "But why did he not come to me for it?"

The Jew entered into a long explanation about a gambling debt which had had to be paid on a certain morning before midday, that no one would lend Paul anything as he was not yet of age, and that his "honour would have been compromised," if he, the Jew, had not "rendered this little service" to the young man. Jeanne wanted to send for the Baron,

but her emotion seemed to have paralysed her, and she could not rise from her seat.

"Would you be kind enough to ring?" she said to the money-lender, at last.

He feared some trick, and hesitated for a moment.

"If I inconvenience you, I will call again," he stammered.

She answered him by a shake of the head, and when he had rung they waited in silence for the Baron. The latter at once understood the situation. The bill was for fifteen hundred francs. He paid the Jew a thousand, saying to him with a significant stare:

"Don't let me see you here again," and the man thanked him, bowed, and went away.

The grandfather and the mother at once went over to Havre, but when they arrived at the college they learnt that Paul had not been there for a month. The principal had received four letters, apparently from Jeanne, the first telling him that his pupil was ill, the others to say how he was getting on, and each letter was accompanied by a doctor's certificate; of course they were all forged. They were overwhelmed and sat there staring at each other. The principal, feeling very sorry for them, took them to the police, and they slept at an hotel that night.

The next day Paul was discovered at the house of a fast woman. His mother and grandfather took him back with them to Les Peuples, and the whole way not a word was exchanged. Jeanne hid her face in her handkerchief and cried, and Paul looked out of the window with an air of indifference.

Before the end of the week they found out that,

during the last three months, Paul had contracted debts to the amount of fifteen thousand francs, but the creditors had not shown themselves, because they knew the boy would soon be of age. Poulet was asked for no explanation, as his relations hoped to reform him by kindness. He was pampered and caressed in every way; the choicest dishes were prepared for him, and, as it was spring time, a boat was hired for him at Yport, in spite of Jeanne's nervousness, that he might go sailing whenever he liked. He was not allowed to have a horse, for fear he should ride to Havre. He became idle, irritable and brutal, at times. The Baron grieved over his neglected studies, and even Jeanne, much as she dreaded to be parted from him again, began to wonder what was to be done with him.

One evening he did not come home. It was found, on inquiry, that he had gone out in a boat with two sailors, and his distracted mother hurried down to Yport, without stopping even to put anything over her head. On the beach she found a few men awaiting the return of the boat, and out on the sea was a little swaying light, which was drawing nearer and nearer to the shore. The boat came in, but Paul was not on board; he had ordered the men to take him to Havre, and had landed there.

The police sought him in vain; he was nowhere to be found, and the woman, who had hidden him once before, had sold all her furniture, paid her rent, and disappeared also, without leaving any trace behind her. In Paul's room at Les Peuples two letters were found from this creature, who seemed madly in love with him, saying that she had obtained the necessary

money for a journey to England. The three inmates of the château lived on, gloomy and despairing, through all this mental torture. Jeanne's hair, which had been gray before, was now quite white, and she sometimes asked herself what she could have done, that Fate should so mercilessly pursue her. One day she received the following letter from the Abbé Tolbiac:

"MADAME: The hand of God has been laid heavily upon you. You have refused to give your son to Him, and He has delivered him over to a prostitute. Will you not profit by this lesson from heaven? God's mercy is infinite, and perhaps He will pardon you if you throw yourself at His feet. I am His humble servant, and I will open His door to you when you come and knock."

Jeanne sat for a long time with this letter lying open on her knees. Perhaps, after all, the priest's words were true; and all her religious doubts and uncertainties returned to harass her mind. Was it possible that God could be vindictive and jealous like men? But if He was not jealous, He would no longer be feared and loved, and, no doubt, it was that we might better know Him, that He manifested Himself to men, as influenced by the same feeling as themselves. Then she felt the fear, the cowardly dread, which urges those who hesitate and doubt to seek the safety of the Church, and one evening, when it was dark, she stealthily ran to the presbytery, and knelt at the feet of the fragile-looking priest to solicit absolution. He only promised her a semi-

pardon as God could not shower all His favours on a house which sheltered such a man as the Baron. "Still, you will soon receive a proof of the divine mercy," said the priest.

Two days later, Jeanne did indeed receive a letter from her son, and in the excess of her grief, she looked upon it as the forerunner of the consolation promised by the priest. The letter ran thus:

"MY DEAR MOTHER: Do not be uneasy about me. I am in London, and in good health, but in great need of money. We have not a sou, and some days we have to go without anything to eat. She who is with me, and whom I love with all my heart, has spent all she had, some five thousand francs, that she might remain with me, and you will, of course, understand that I am bound in honour to discharge my debt to her at the very first opportunity. I shall soon be of age, but it would be very good of you if you would advance me fifteen thousand francs of what I inherit from papa; it would relieve me from great embarrassments.

"Good-bye, mother dear; much love to grandfather, Aunt Lison and yourself. I hope to see you soon again. Your son,

"VICOMTE PAUL DE LAMARE."

He had written to her! Then he had not forgotten her! She did not stop to think that it was simply to ask her for money; he had none and some should be sent him; what did money matter? He had written to her!

She ran to show the letter to the Baron, the tears

streaming from her eyes. Aunt Lison was called, and, word by word, they read over this letter which spoke of their loved one, and lingered over every sentence. Jeanne, transported from the deepest despair to a kind of intoxication of joy, began to take Paul's part.

"Now he has written, he will come back," she said. "I am sure he will come back."

"Still he left us for this creature," said the Baron, who was calm enough to reason; "and he must love her better than he does us, since he did not hesitate in his choice between her and his home."

The words sent a sudden pang of anguish through Jeanne's heart, and within her sprang up the fierce, deadly hatred of a jealous mother against the woman who had robbed her of her son. Until then her every thought had been for Paul, and she had hardly realized that this creature was the cause of all his errors; but the Baron's argument had suddenly brought this rival vividly to her mind, had revealed her fatal power, and she felt that between this woman and herself there must be a determined, bitter warfare. And she also felt that she would rather lose her son than share him with another; and all her joy vanished.

The fifteen thousand francs were sent, and for five months nothing more was heard of Paul. At the end of that time a lawyer came to the château to see about his inheritance. Jeanne and the Baron acceded to all his demands without any dispute, even giving up the money to which the mother had a right for her lifetime, and when he returned to Paris, Paul found himself the possessor of a hundred and

twenty thousand francs. During the next six months only four short letters were received from him, giving news of his doings in a few, concise sentences, and ending with formal protestations of affection.

"I am not idle," he said. "I have obtained a post in connection with the Stock Exchange, and I hope some day to see my dear relations at Les Peuples."

He never mentioned his mistress, but his silence was more significant than if he had written four pages about her; and, in these icy letters, Jeanne could feel this woman hidden, the implacable, eternal enemy of every mother — the harlot.

The three lonely people discussed what could be done to save Paul, but they could think of nothing. They would have gone to Paris, but they knew that would be no good.

"We must let this passion wear itself out," said the Baron; "sooner or later he will return to us of his own accord." And the mournful days dragged on.

Jeanne and Lison got into the habit of going to church together without letting the Baron know; and a long time passed without any news from Paul. Then, one morning they received a desperate letter which terrified them.

"MY DEAR MOTHER: I am lost; I shall have no resource left but to blow out my brains if you do not help me. A speculation which held out every hope of success has turned out badly, and I owe eighty-five thousand francs. It means dishonour, ruin, the destruction of all my future, if I do not pay, and, I say again, rather than survive the disgrace

I will blow my brains out. I should, perhaps, have done so already, had it not been for the brave and hopeful words of a woman, whose name I never mention to you, but who is the good genius of my life.

"I send you my very best love, dear mother. Good-bye, perhaps for ever.

"PAUL."

Enclosed in the letter was a bundle of business papers giving the details of this unfortunate speculation. The Baron answered by return post that they would help as much as they could. Then he went to Havre to get legal advice, mortgaged some property and forwarded the money to Paul. The young man wrote back three cheerful letters full of passionate affection, and said they might expect him almost immediately. But he did not come, and another year passed away.

Jeanne and the Baron were on the point of starting for Paris, to find him and make one last effort to persuade him to return, when they received a few lines saying he was again in London, starting a steamboat company which was to trade under the name of "Paul Delamare & Co." "My fortune is assured, perhaps great wealth. At any rate I risk nothing, and you must at once see the advantages of the scheme. When I see you again, I shall be well up in the world; there is nothing like trade for making money, nowadays."

Three months later, the steamboat company went bankrupt, and the manager was prosecuted for falsifying the books. Jeanne had an hysterical

fit which lasted several hours, and then took to her bed. The Baron went to Havre, made every inquiry, saw lawyers, men of business, solicitors, and sheriffs, and found that the Delamare Company had failed for two hundred and fifty thousand francs. He again mortgaged his property, and borrowed a large sum on Les Peuples and the two adjoining farms. One evening he was going through some final formalities in a lawyer's office, when he suddenly fell to the ground in an apoplectic fit. A mounted messenger was at once dispatched to Jeanne, but her father died before she could arrive. She took him back to Les Peuples, so overcome that her grief was a stupor rather than a pain. But the Abbé Tolbiac refused to allow the body to be interred with any sacred rites, in spite of all the entreaties of the two women, so the burial took place at night without any ceremony whatever.

Paul, who was still hiding in England, heard of his grandfather's death through the liquidators of the company, and wrote to say he should have come before, but he had only just heard the sad news. He concluded: "Now you have rescued me from my difficulties, mother dear, I shall return to France, and shall at once come to see you."

Jeanne lived in such a state of depression that she appeared not to understand anything more.

Towards the end of that winter Aunt Lison, who was now sixty-eight, had a severe attack of bronchitis, which turned to inflammation of the lungs, and the old maid quietly expired.

"I will ask the good God to take pity on you, my poor little Jeanne," were the last words she uttered.

Jeanne followed her to the grave, saw the earth fall on the coffin, and then sank to the ground, longing for death to take her also, that she might cease to think and to suffer. As she fell, a big, strong peasant woman caught her in her arms and carried her away as if she had been a child. When they got back to the château Jeanne let herself be put to bed by this stranger, who handled her so tenderly and firmly, and at once fell asleep, for she had spent the last five nights watching beside the old maid, and she was thoroughly exhausted by sorrow and fatigue. It was the middle of the night when she again opened her eyes. A night-lamp was burning on the mantelpiece, and in the arm-chair lay a woman asleep. Jeanne did not know who it was, and, leaning over the side of the bed, she tried to make out her features by the glimmering light of the wick floating in a glass filled with oil. She fancied she had seen this face before, but she could not remember when or where.

The woman was quietly sleeping, her head drooping on one shoulder, her cap lying on the ground. She was forty or forty-five years of age, a strong, red-faced, square-shouldered, powerful woman, with hair that was turning grey. Her big hands were hanging on each side of the chair. Jeanne stared at her, her mind in that troubled state of awakening from the feverish sleep that follows great misfortunes. Surely she had seen that face! Was it a long time ago or quite recently? She could not remember, and this idea disturbed and irritated her. She softly got out of bed, and went on tip-toe to see the sleeping woman nearer. It was the

peasant who had caught her in her arms in the cemetery, and had afterwards put her to bed; she vaguely remembered this. But surely she had known her in former times, under other circumstances? And yet perhaps the face was only familiar to her because she had seen it that day in the cemetery. Still how was it that the woman was sleeping here?

Just then the stranger opened her eyes and saw Jeanne standing beside her. She started up, and they stood face to face, so close together that they touched each other.

"How is it that you're out of bed?" said the peasant; "you'll make yourself ill, getting up at this time of night. Go back to bed again."

"Who are you?" asked Jeanne.

The woman made no answer, but picked Jeanne up and carried her back to bed with the strength of a man. She gently laid her down, and, as she bent over her, she suddenly began to cover her cheeks, her hair, her eyes with violent kisses, while the tears streamed from her eyes.

"My poor mistress! Mam'zelle Jeanne, my poor mistress! Don't you know me?" she sobbed.

"Rosalie, my girl!" cried Jeanne, throwing her arms round the woman's neck and kissing her; and, clasped in each other's arms they mingled their tears and sobs together.

Rosalie dried her eyes the first. "Come now," she said, "you must be good and not catch cold."

She picked up the clothes, tucked up the bed and put the pillow back under the head of her former mistress, who lay choking with emotion as the memo-

ries of days that were past and gone rushed back to her mind.

"How is it you have come back, my poor girl?" she asked.

"Do you think I was going to leave you to live all alone now?" answered Rosalie.

"Light a candle and let me look at you," went on Jeanne.

Rosalie placed a light on the table by the bed-side, and for a long time they gazed at each other in silence.

"I should never have known you again," murmured Jeanne, holding out her hand to her old servant. "I should never have recognized you. You have altered very much, though not so much as I have."

"Yes, you have changed, Madame Jeanne, and more than you ought to have done," answered Rosalie, as she looked at this thin, faded, white-haired woman, whom she had left young and beautiful; "but you must remember it's twenty-four years since we have seen one another."

"Well, have you been happy?" asked Jeanne after a long pause.

"Oh, yes — yes, Madame. I haven't had much to grumble at; I've been happier than you — that's certain. The only thing that I've always regretted is that I didn't stop here —" She broke off abruptly, finding she had unthinkingly touched upon the very subject she wished to avoid.

"Well, you know, Rosalie, one cannot have everything one wants," replied Jeanne gently; "and now you, too, are a widow, are you not?" Then her

voice trembled, as she went on, "Have you any — any other children?"

"No, Madame."

"And what is your — your son? Are you satisfied with him?"

"Yes, Madame; he's a good lad, and a hard worker. He married about six months ago, and he is going to have the farm; now I have come back to you."

"Then you will not leave me again?" murmured Jeanne.

"No fear, Madame," answered Rosalie in a rough tone. "I've arranged all about that."

And for some time nothing more was said.

Jeanne could not help comparing Rosalie's life with her own, but she had become quite resigned to the cruelty and injustice of Fate, and she felt no bitterness.

"Was your husband kind to you?"

"Oh, yes, Madame; he was a good, industrious fellow, and managed to put by a good deal. He died of consumption."

Then Jeanne sat up in bed, filled with a desire to hear more. "Tell me all about your life, and everything that has happened to you," she said. "I feel as if it would do me good to hear it."

Rosalie drew up a chair, sat down, and began to talk about herself, her house, her friends, entering into all the little details in which country people delight, describing her farm-yard, laughing sometimes over things which made her think of the happy times that were over, and gradually raising her voice as she went on, like a woman accustomed to commands. She wound up by saying:

"Oh, I'm well off now; I needn't be afraid of anything. But I owe it all to you," she added in a lower, faltering voice; "and now I've come back I'm not going to take any wages. No! I won't! So, if you don't choose to have me on those terms, I shall go away again."

"But you do not mean to serve me for nothing?" said Jeanne.

"Yes, I do, Madame. Money! You give me money! Why, I've almost as much as you have yourself. Do you know how much you will have after all these loans and mortgages have been cleared off, and you have paid all the interest you have let run on and increase? You don't know, do you? Well, then, let me tell you that you haven't ten thousand francs a year; not ten thousand. But I'm going to put everything straight, and pretty soon, too."

She had again raised her voice, for the thought of the ruin which hung over the house, and the way in which the interest money had been neglected roused her anger and indignation. A faint, sad smile which passed over her mistress's face angered her still more, and she cried:

"You ought not to laugh at it, Madame. People are good for nothing without money."

Jeanne took both the servant's hands in hers.

"I have never had any luck," she said slowly, as if she could think of nothing else. "Everything has gone the wrong way with me. My whole life has been ruined by a cruel Fate."

"You must not talk like that, Madame," said Rosalie, shaking her head. "You made an unhappy

A WOMAN'S LIFE

marriage, that's all. But people oughtn't to marry before they know anything about their future husbands."

They went on talking about themselves and their past loves like two old friends, and when the day dawned they were still talking.

XII.

WITHIN a week Rosalie had everything and everybody in the château under her control, and even Jeanne yielded passive obedience. She was very weak now, and her legs dragged along as the Baronne's used to do. She went out on the arm of her maid, who guided her slowly, scolded her, and soothed her with brusque words of affection, as if she were a sick child. Their conversation was always about bygone times, of which Jeanne talked with tears in her eyes, and Rosalie in the calm, quiet way of an impassive peasant.

The old servant returned several times to the question of the interest that was owing, and demanded the papers which Jeanne, ignorant of all business matters, had hidden away that Rosalie might not know of Paul's misdoings. Next Rosalie went over to Fécamp each day for a week to get everything explained to her by a lawyer whom she knew; then one evening, after she had put her mistress to bed, she sat down beside her and said abruptly:

"Now you're in bed, Madame, we will have a little talk."

She told Jeanne exactly how matters stood, and that when every claim had been settled she, Jeanne, would have about seven or eight thousand francs a year; not a penny more.

"Well, Rosalie," answered Jeanne, "I know I shall not live to be very old, and I shall have enough until I die."

"Very likely you will, Madame," replied Rosalie, getting angry; "but how about M. Paul? Don't you mean to leave him anything?"

Jeanne shuddered. "Pray, don't ever speak to me about him; I cannot bear to think of him."

"Yes, but I want to talk to you about him, because you don't look at things in the right light, Madame Jeanne. He may be doing all sorts of foolish things now, but he won't always behave the same. He'll marry and then he'll want money to educate his children and to bring them up properly. Now listen to what I am going to say; you must sell *Les Peuples* —"

But Jeanne started up in bed.

"Sell *Les Peuples*! How can you think of such a thing? No! I will never sell it!"

Rosalie was not in the least put out.

"But I say you will, Madame, simply because you must."

Then she explained her plans and her calculations. She had already found a purchaser for *Les Peuples* and the two adjoining farms, and when they had been sold Jeanne would still have four farms at Saint Léonard, which, freed from the mortgages, would bring in about eight thousand three hundred francs a year. Thirteen hundred francs would have to go for the keeping up and repairing of the property; then seven thousand would remain, out of which five thousand would be taken for yearly

income, and two thousand would be set aside as an insurance fund.

"Everything else is gone, so there's an end of it," said Rosalie. "But, in future, I shall keep the money, and M. Paul sha'n't have another penny from you. He'd take your last farthing."

"But if he has nothing to eat?" murmured Jeanne, who was quietly weeping.

"He can come to us if he's hungry; there'll always be victuals and a bed for him. He'd never have got into trouble if you hadn't given him any money the first time he asked for some."

"But he was in debt; he would have been dishonoured."

"And don't you think he'll get into debt just the same when you've no more money to give him? You have paid his debts up to now, so well and good; but you won't pay any more, I can tell you. And now, good-night, Madame."

And away she went.

The idea of selling *Les Peuples* and leaving the house where she had passed her whole life threw Jeanne into a state of extreme agitation, and she lay awake the whole night. "I shall never be able to go away from here," she said, when Rosalie came into the room next morning.

"You'll have to, all the same, Madame," answered the maid with rising temper. "The lawyer is coming presently with the man who wants to buy the château, and, if you don't sell it, you won't have a blade of grass to call your own in four years' time."

"Oh, I cannot! I cannot!" moaned Jeanne.

But an hour afterwards came a letter from Paul

asking for ten thousand francs. What was to be done? Jeanne did not know, and, in her distress, she consulted Rosalie, who shrugged her shoulders, and observed:

"What did I tell you, Madame? Oh, you'd both of you have been in a nice muddle if I hadn't come back."

Then, giving in to the servant, Jeanne wrote back:

"MY DEAR SON: I cannot help you any more; you have ruined me, and I am even obliged to sell Les Peuples. But I shall always have a home for you whenever you choose to return to your poor old mother, who has suffered so cruelly through you.
JEANNE."

When the lawyer came with M. Jeoffrin, who was a retired sugar baker, Jeanne herself received them, and invited them to go all over the house and grounds. Then a month after this visit, she signed the deed of sale, and bought, at the same time, a little villa in the hamlet of Batteville, standing on the Montivilliers highroad, near Goderville.

Then she walked up and down all alone until evening, in little mother's avenue, with a sore heart and troubled mind, bidding distracted and sobbing farewells to the landscape, the trees, the rustic bench under the plane-tree, to all those things she knew so well and that seemed to have become part of her vision and her soul, the grove, the mound overlooking the plain, where she had so often sat, and from where she had seen the Comte de Fourville running towards the sea on that terrible day

of Julien's death, to an old elm whose upper branches were missing, against which she had often leaned, and to all this familiar garden spot.

Rosalie came out and took her by the arm to make her come into the house.

A tall young peasant of twenty-five was waiting outside the door. He greeted her in a friendly manner as if he had known her for some time: "Good-day, Madame Jeanne. I hope you are well. Mother told me to come and help you move. I would like to know what you are going to take away, seeing that I shall do it from time to time so as not to interfere with my farm work."

It was her maid's son, Julien's son, Paul's brother. She felt as if her heart had stopped beating; and yet she would have liked to embrace this young fellow.

She looked at him, trying to find some resemblance to her husband or to her son. He was ruddy, vigorous, with fair hair and his mother's blue eyes. And yet he looked like Julien. In what way? How? She could not have told, but there was something like him in the whole look of his face.

"I should be very much obliged if you could show me the things now," continued the lad.

But she did not know herself yet what she should be able to take, her new house was so small, and she asked him to come again in a week's time.

For some time the removal occupied Jeanne's thoughts, and made a change, though a sad one, in her dull, hopeless life. She went from room to room seeking the pieces of furniture which were associated in her mind with various events in her life, the furniture which becomes, in time part of our lives —

almost of ourselves — to which sad and happy memories are attached, dates in our history, and which have been the silent companions of our pleasant and gloomy hours, have grown old and worn with us, whose coverings are torn in places and burst, whose joints are shaky, whose colours are faded.

As agitated as if the decision she were making had been of capital importance, Jeanne chose, one by one, the things she should take with her, often hesitating, and altering her mind at every moment, as she stood unable to decide the respective merits of two arm-chairs, or of some old *escritoire* and a still older work-table. She opened and searched every drawer, and tried to remember facts, and when at last she made up her mind and said: "Yes, I shall take this," the article she had decided upon was taken downstairs and put into the dining-room. She wished to keep the whole of her bedroom furniture, the bed, the tapestry, the clock — everything, and she also took a few of the drawing-room chairs, choosing those with the designs she had always liked ever since her childhood — the fox and the stork, the fox and the crow, the ant and the grasshopper, and the melancholy heron.

One day, as she was wandering all over this house she should so soon have to leave, Jeanne went up into the garret. She was amazed: there lay articles of furniture of every description, some broken, others only soiled, others again stored away simply because they no longer pleased, because fresh things had been bought and put in their places. She recognized a hundred little odds and ends which used to be

downstairs and has disappeared without her noticing their absence — things of no value which she had often used, insignificant little articles, which had stood fifteen years before her eyes and had never attracted her attention, but which now — suddenly discovered in the lumber-room, lying side by side with other things older still and which she could quite distinctly remember seeing when she first returned from the convent — became as precious in her eyes as if they had been forgotten witnesses, or friends that had been found again. As she looked at them she felt as she might have done if people she had known a long time, who had never revealed themselves, had suddenly begun one evening to talk interminably, and to reveal a soul she had never dreamed they possessed.

As she went from one thing to another, and remembered little incidents in connection with them, her heart felt as if it would break. "Why, this is the china cup I cracked a few days before I was married, and here is mamma's little lantern, and the cane papa broke trying to open the wooden gate the rain had swollen."

Besides all these familiar objects there were a great many things she had never seen before, which had belonged to her grandparents or her great-grandparents. Covered with dust they looked like sad, forsaken exiles from another century, their history and adventures for ever lost, for there was no one living now who had known those who had chosen, bought and treasured them, or who had seen the hands which had so often touched them or the eyes which had found such pleasure in looking at

them. Jeanne touched them, and turned them about, her fingers leaving their traces on the thick dust; and she stayed for a long, long time amidst these old things in the garret, which was dimly lighted by a little skylight.

She tried to find other things with associations to them, and very carefully she examined some three-legged chairs, a copper warming-pan, a dented foot-warmer, which she thought she remembered, and all the other worn-out household utensils. Then she put all the things she thought she should like to take away together, and going downstairs, sent Rosalie up to fetch them. The latter indignantly refused to bring down "such rubbish," but Jeanne, though she hardly ever showed any will of her own, now would have her own way this time, and the servant had to obey.

One morning young Denis Lecoq, Julien's son, came, with his cart, to take away the first lot of things, and Rosalie went off with him to look after the unloading, and to see that the furniture was put into the right rooms.

When she was alone Jeanne began to visit every room in the château, and to kiss in a transport of passionate sorrow and regret everything that she was forced to leave behind her—the big white birds in the drawing-room tapestry, the old candlesticks, anything and everything that came in her way. She went from room to room, half mad with grief, and the tears streaming from her eyes, and, when she had gone all over the house, she went out to "say good-bye" to the sea. It was the end of September, and the dull yellowish waves stretched

away as far as the eye could reach, under the lowering gray sky which hung over the world. For a long, long while Jeanne stood on the cliff, her thoughts running on all her sorrows and troubles, and it was not till night drew on that she went indoors. In that day she had gone through as much suffering as she had ever passed through in her greatest griefs.

Rosalie had returned enchanted with the new house, declaring that it was much livelier than this big barn of a place that was not even on a main road, but Jeanne wept the whole evening.

Now they knew the château was sold the farmers showed Jeanne barely the respect that was due to her, and, though they hardly knew why, among themselves they always spoke of her as "that lunatic." Perhaps, with their brute-like instinct, they perceived her unhealthy and increasing sentimentality, her morbid reveries, and the disordered and pitiful state of her mind which so much sorrow and affliction had unhinged.

Happening to go through the stables the day before her departure, a growl made her start. It was Massacre, whose existence she had entirely forgotten. Long past the age at which dogs generally die, he had become blind and paralysed, and dragged out his life on a bed of straw, looked after by Ludivine, who never forgot him. Jeanne took him up in her arms, kissed him and carried him into the house. As fat as a pig, he could hardly creep along, his legs were so stiff, and he barked like a child's wooden toy-dog.

At length the last day dawned. Jeanne had passed

the night in Julien's old room, as all the furniture had been moved out of hers, and when she rose she felt as tired and exhausted as if she had just been running a long distance.

In the court-yard stood a cart on which the remainder of the furniture and the trunks were already loaded. Another two-wheeled carriage was standing behind ready to take Rosalie and her mistress. Ludivine and old Simon were to stay at the château until its new owner arrived, and then they were going to their relatives, Jeanne having given them a small pension. Besides this they had their savings. They were now very old, garrulous and unfit for service. Marius had married and left the château long ago.

About eight o'clock a fine, cold rain, driven by the wind from the sea, began to fall, and already the leaves were falling. The cart had to be covered over with tarpaulins. Some steaming cups of coffee stood on the kitchen-table, and Jeanne sat down and slowly drank hers up; then rising:

"Let us go," she said.

She began to put on her hat and shawl, while Rosalie put on her goloshes. A great lump rose in her throat, and she whispered:

"Rosalie, do you remember how it rained the day we left Rouen to come here?"

She broke off abruptly, pressed her hands to her heart, and fell backwards in a sort of fit. For more than an hour she lay as if she were dead, then, when she opened her eyes, she was seized with convulsions and burst into tears. Gradually she became calmer, but this attack had left her so weak that she

could not rise to her feet. Rosalie, fearing another attack if they did not get her away at once, went for her son, and between them, they carried her to the gig, and placed her on the leather-covered seat. The old servant got up beside her, wrapped up her legs, threw a thick cloak over her shoulders, then, opening an umbrella over her head, cried:

“Make haste, and let’s get off, Denis.”

The young man climbed up beside his mother, sat down with one leg right outside the gig, for want of room, and started off his horse at a quick, jerky trot, which shook the two women from side to side. As they turned the corner of the village, they saw some one walking up and down the road; it was the Abbé Tolbiac, apparently waiting to see their departure. He was holding up his cassock with one hand to keep it out of the wet, regardless of showing his thin legs which were encased in black stockings, and his huge, muddy boots. When he saw the carriage coming he stopped, and stood on one side to let it pass. Jeanne looked down to avoid meeting his eyes, while Rosalie, who had heard all about him, furiously muttered: “You brute, you brute!” and seizing her son’s hand, “Give him a cut with the whip!” she exclaimed. The young man, just as they were passing the Abbé, suddenly let the wheel of the gig drop into a deep rut, as it was going at full speed. There was a splash, and the priest was covered with mud from head to foot. Rosalie was delighted, and turning round, she shook her fist at the priest as he stood wiping himself down with his big handkerchief.

They went on for five minutes, when Jeanne suddenly cried: “Oh, we have forgotten Massacre!”

A WOMAN'S LIFE

Denis pulled up, gave Rosalie the reins to hold, and jumped down to run and fetch the dog. Finally the young man came back with the big, mangy, shapeless animal in his arms and placed him in the gig between the two women.

XIII.

TWO hours later the carriage stopped in front of a little brick house, standing by the high road in the middle of an orchard planted with pear-trees. Four lattice-work arbours covered with honeysuckle and clematis stood at the four corners of the garden, which was planted with vegetables, and laid out in little beds with narrow paths bordered with fruit-trees running between them, and both garden and orchard were entirely surrounded by a thickset hedge which was separated by a field from the next farm. About thirty yards lower down the road was a forge, and the nearest houses were a mile away. The view looked out over the plain of Caux with farms scattered here and there, half-hidden by the four double rows of big trees which surrounded the orchards.

Jeanne wanted to rest as soon as they arrived, but Rosalie, wishing to keep her from thinking, would not let her do so. The carpenter from Goderville had come to help them put the place in order, and they all began to arrange the furniture which was already there, without waiting for the last cart-load which might be delayed. It was a big job and involved much thought and argument. Then the cart arrived in an hour's time, and had to be unloaded in the rain. When night fell the house was

in a state of utter disorder, and all the rooms were full of things piled anyhow, one on top of another. Jeanne was tired out and fell asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

The next few days there was so much to do that she had no time to fret; in fact, she even found a certain pleasure in making her new home pretty, for all the time she was working she thought that her son would one day come and live there. The tapestry from her old bedroom was hung in the dining-room, which was also to serve as a drawing-room, and Jeanne took especial pains over the arrangement of one of the rooms on the first floor, which in her own mind she had already named "Poulet's room;" she was to have the other one on that floor, and Rosalie was to sleep upstairs next to the garret. The little house thus tastefully arranged, looked pretty, and at first Jeanne was pleased with it, although she was haunted by the feeling that there was something missing, though she could not tell what.

One morning a clerk came over from the notary at Fécamp with the three thousand six hundred francs, the price at which an upholsterer had valued the furniture left at Les Peuples. Jeanne felt a thrill of pleasure as she took the money, and as soon as the man had gone she put on her hat and hurried off to Goderville to send Paul this unlooked-for sum as quickly as possible. But as she was hastening along the road she met Rosalie coming back from market; the maid suspected that something had happened though she did not at once guess the truth. She soon found it out, however, for Jeanne

could not hide anything from her, and placing her basket on the ground to give way to her wrath at her ease, she put her hands on her hips and scolded Jeanne at the top of her voice; then she took hold of her mistress with her right hand and her basket with her left and walked on again towards the house in a great passion. As soon as they were indoors Rosalie ordered the money to be given into her care, and Jeanne gave it to her, with the exception of the six hundred francs which she said nothing about; but this trick was soon detected by the now suspicious servant and Jeanne had to give it all up. However, Rosalie consented to these odd hundreds being sent to the young man, who in a few days wrote to thank his mother for the money. "You have done me a great service, mother dear," he said, "for we were reduced to utter want."

Jeanne, however, could not get accustomed to Batteville. She felt she could not breathe as she used to and she felt more alone and forsaken than ever. She would often walk as far as the village of Verneuil and come back through Trois-Mares, but as soon as she was home she started up to go out again as if she had forgotten to go to the very place to which she had meant to walk. The same thing happened time after time and she could not understand where it was she longed to go; one evening, however, she unconsciously uttered a sentence which at once revealed to her the secret of her restlessness. "Oh! how I long to see the ocean," she said as she sat down to dinner.

The sea! That was what she missed. Her neighbour for twenty-five years. The sea with its salt

breezes, its roar, its tempests, its strong odours; the sea, which she could see every morning from her window at Les Peuples, which she inhaled day and night, and which, unconsciously, she had come to love like a human being.

Massacre, too, was very uneasy. The very evening of his arrival at the new house he had installed himself under the kitchen-dresser and no one could get him to move out. There he lay all day long, never stirring, except to turn himself over with a smothered grunt, but as soon as it was dark he got up and dragged himself towards the garden door, grazing himself against the wall as he went. After he had stayed out of doors a few minutes he came in again, and sat down before the stove, which was still warm, and as soon as Jeanne and Rosalie had gone to bed, he began to howl. The whole night long he howled, in a pitiful, deplorable way, sometimes ceasing for an hour, only to recommence in a still more doleful tone. A barrel was put outside the house and he was tied up to it, but he howled just the same out of doors as in, and as he was old and almost dying, he was brought back to the kitchen again.

It was impossible for Jeanne to sleep, for the whole night she could hear the old dog moaning and scratching as he tried to get used to this new house, knowing well it was not his old home. Nothing would quiet him; his eyes were dim and it seemed as if the knowledge of his infirmity made him keep still while everyone else was awake and downstairs, and at night he wandered restlessly about until daybreak, as if he only dared to move in the darkness which

makes all beings sightless for the time. It was an intense relief to everyone when one morning he was found dead.

Winter wore on, and Jeanne gave way more and more to an insuperable hopelessness; it was no longer a keen, heart-rending grief that she felt, but a dull, gloomy melancholy. There was nothing to rouse her from it, no one came to see her, and the road which passed before her door was almost deserted. Sometimes a gig passed by driven by a red-faced man whose blouse, blown out by the wind, looked like a blue balloon, and sometimes a cart crawled past, or a peasant and his wife could be seen coming from the distance, growing larger and larger as they approached the house and then diminishing again when they had passed it, till they looked like two insects at the end of the long white line, which stretched as far as the eye could reach, rising and falling with the undulation of the earth. When the grass again sprang up, a little girl in a short dress passed the gate every morning with two thin cows, which browsed along the side of the road, and in the evening she returned, taking, as in the morning, one step every ten minutes as she followed the animals.

Every night Jeanne dreamt that she was again at Les Peuples. She thought she was there with her father and mother and Aunt Lison, as in the old times. Again she accomplished the old, forgotten duties and supported Madame Adelaide as she walked in her avenue; and each time she awoke she burst into tears.

Paul was continually in her thoughts, and she

A WOMAN'S LIFE

wondered what he was doing, if he were well and if he ever thought of her. She revolved all these painful thoughts in her mind as she walked along the low-lying roads between the farms, and what was more torture to her than anything else was the fierce jealousy of the woman who had deprived her of her son. It was this hatred alone which restrained her from taking any steps towards finding Paul and trying to see him. She could imagine her son's mistress confronting her at the door and asking, "What is your business here, Madame?" and her self-respect would not permit her to run the risk of such an encounter. In the haughty pride of a chaste and spotless woman, who had never stooped to listen to temptation, she became still more bitter against the base and cowardly actions of a man enslaved by the filthy practices of carnal love, which degrades even the heart. The whole of humanity seemed to her unclean as she thought of the obscene secrets of the senses, of the caresses which debase, and of all the mysteries which surround the attraction of the sexes.

Another spring and summer passed away, and when the autumn came again with its rainy days, its dull, gray skies, its heavy clouds, Jeanne felt so weary of the life she was leading that she determined to make a supreme attempt to regain possession of her Poulet. Surely the young man's passion must have cooled by this time, and she wrote him a touching, pitiful letter:

"MY DEAR CHILD — I entreat you to return to me. Think how I am left, lonely, aged and ill, the

A WOMAN'S LIFE

whole year with only a servant. I am living now in a little house by the road-side and it is very miserable for me, but if you were here everything would seem different. You are all I have in the world, and I have not seen you for seven years. You will never know how unhappy I have been and how my every thought was centered in you. You were my life, my soul, my only hope, my only love, and you are away from me, you have forsaken me.

"Oh! come back, my darling Poulet, come back, and let me hold you in my arms again; come back to your old mother who so longs to see you.

"JEANNE."

A few days later came the following reply:

"MY DEAR MOTHER — I should only be too glad to come and see you, but I have not a penny; send me some money and I will come. I had myself been thinking of coming to speak to you about a plan which, if carried out, would permit me to do as you desire.

"I shall never be able to repay the disinterested affection of the woman who has shared all my troubles, but I can at least make a public recognition of her faithful love and devotion. Her behaviour is all you could desire; she is well-educated and well-read and you cannot imagine what a comfort she has been to me. I should be a brute if I did not make her some recompense, and I ask your permission to marry her. Then we could all live together in your new house, and you would forgive my follies. I am convinced that you would give your consent

A WOMAN'S LIFE

at once, if you knew her; I assure you she is very lady-like and quiet, and I know you would like her. As for me, I could not live without her.

"I shall await your reply with every impatience, dear mother. We both send you much love. — Your son,

VICOMTE PAUL DE LAMARE."

Jeanne was stunned. As she sat with the letter on her knees, she could see so plainly through the designs of this woman who had not once let Paul return to his friends, but had always kept him at her side while she patiently waited until his mother should give in and consent to anything and everything in the irresistible desire of having her son with her again; and it was with bitter pain that she thought of how Paul obstinately persisted in preferring this creature to herself. "He does not love me, he does not love me," she murmured over and over again.

"Now, he wants to marry her," she said, when Rosalie came in.

The servant started.

"Oh! Madame, you surely will not consent to it. M. Paul can't marry such a hussy."

All the pride in Jeanne's nature rose in revolt at the thought, and though she was bowed down with grief, she replied decidedly:

"No, Rosalie, never. But since he won't come here I will go to him, and we will see which of us two will win."

She wrote at once to Paul to prepare him for her visit and to arrange to meet him elsewhere than in

the house he was living with that baggage. Then while she awaited his reply, she began to make all her preparations for the journey, and Rosalie began to pack her mistress's underwear and clothes in an old trunk.

"You haven't a single thing to put on," exclaimed the servant, as she was folding up an old dress she used to wear in the country. "I won't have you go with such clothes; you'd be a disgrace to everyone, and the Parisian ladies would take you for a servant."

Jeanne let her have her own way, and they both went to Goderville and chose some green checked material, which they left with the dressmaker to be made up. Then they went to see Me. Roussel the lawyer, who spent a fortnight in Paris every year, for it was twenty-eight years since Jeanne had been to the capital. He gave them a great deal of advice about crossing the roads and the way to avoid being robbed, saying that the safest plan was to carry only just as much money as was necessary in their pockets and to sew the rest in the lining of their clothes; then he talked for a long time about the restaurants where the charges were moderate, and mentioned two or three to which ladies could go, and he recommended Jeanne to stay at the Hôtel de Normandie, which was near the railway station. He always stayed there himself, and she could say he had sent her. There had been a railway between Paris and Havre for the last six years, but Jeanne, absorbed in her sorrows, had never seen one of these steam-engines of which everyone was talking, and which were revolutionizing the whole country.

The days passed on, but there came no answer from Paul. She waited a week, a fortnight. Every morning Jeanne had gone along the road to meet the postman, and had asked, in a voice which she could not keep steady:

"You have nothing for me to-day, Père Malandain?" And the man always replied in a voice roughened by all kinds of weather: "No, nothing yet, *ma bonne dame*."

Fully persuaded that it was that woman who was preventing Paul from answering, Jeanne determined not to wait any longer, but to start at once. She wanted to take Rosalie with her, but the maid would not go because of increasing the expense of the journey, and she only allowed her mistress to take three hundred francs with her.

"If you want any more money," she said, "write to me, and I'll tell the lawyer to forward you some; but if I give you any more now, Monsieur Paul will get it all from you."

Then one December morning, Denis Lecoq's cart came to take them both to the railway station, for Rosalie was going to accompany her mistress as far as that. When they reached the station, they found out first how much the tickets were, then, when the trunk had been labelled and the ticket bought, they stood watching the rails, both too much occupied in wondering what the train would be like to think of the sad cause of this journey. At last a distant whistle made them look round, and they saw a large, black machine approaching, which came up with a terrible noise, dragging after it a long chain of little rolling houses. A porter opened the door of

one of these little huts, and Jeanne kissed Rosalie and got in.

"*Au revoir*, Madame. I hope you will have a pleasant journey, and will soon be back again."

"*Au revoir*, Rosalie."

There was another whistle, and the string of carriages moved slowly off, gradually going faster and faster, till they reached a terrific speed. In Jeanne's carriage there were only two other passengers, who were both asleep, in two corners, and she sat and watched the fields and farms and villages rush past. She was frightened at the speed at which she was going, and the feeling came over her that she was entering a new phase of life, and was being hurried towards a very different world from that in which she had spent her peaceful girlhood and her monotonous life.

It was evening when she reached Paris. A porter took her trunk, and she followed closely at his heels, sometimes almost running for fear of losing sight of him, and feeling frightened as she was pushed about by the swaying crowd through which she did not know how to make her way.

"I was recommended here by M. Roussel," she hastened to say when she was in the hôtel office.

The landlady, a big, stolid-looking woman, was sitting at the desk.

"Who is M. Roussel?" she asked.

"The lawyer from Goderville, who stays here every year," replied Jeanne, in surprise.

"Very likely he does," responded the big woman, but I don't know him. Do you want a room?"

"Yes, Madame."

A waiter shouldered the luggage and led the way upstairs.

Jeanne followed, feeling very low-spirited and depressed, and sitting down at a little table, she ordered some soup and the wing of a chicken to be sent up to her, for she had had nothing to eat since day-break. She thought of how she had passed through this same town on her return from her wedding tour, as she ate her supper by the miserable light of one candle, and of how Julien had then first shown himself in his true character. But she was young then and brave and hopeful; now she felt old, shy, and full of fears, and the least thing worried and frightened her.

When she had finished her supper, she went to the window and watched the crowded street. She would have liked to go out but she dared not. She thought she would be sure to lose herself, so she went to bed, putting out her candle. But she had hardly yet got over the bustle of the journey, and that, and the noise and the sensation of being in a strange place, kept her awake. The hours passed on, and the noises outside gradually ceased, but still she could not sleep, for she was accustomed to the sound, peaceful sleep of the country, which is so different from the semi-repose of a great city. She was used to the calm, deep sleep of the country which pervades everything, men, beasts and plants. Here she was conscious of a sort of restlessness all around her; the murmur of voices reached her ears, and every now and then a board creaked, a door shut, or a bell rang. She was just dozing off, about two o'clock in the morning, when a woman suddenly began to scream in a neighbouring room. Jeanne started up

in bed, and next she thought she heard a man laughing. As dawn approached she became more and more anxious to see Paul, and as soon as it was light, she got up and dressed.

He lived in the Rue du Sauvage, and she meant to follow Rosalie's advice about spending as little as possible, and walked there. It was a fine day, though the wind was keen, and there were a great many people hurrying along the pavements. Jeanne walked along the street as quickly as she could. When she reached the other end, she was to turn to the right, then to the left; then she would come to a square, where she was to ask again. She could not find the square, and a baker from whom she inquired the way gave her different directions altogether. She started on again, missed the way, wandered about, and in trying to follow other directions, lost herself entirely. She walked on and on, and was just going to hail a cab when she saw the Seine. Then she decided to walk along the quays, and in about an hour she reached the dark, dirty lane called Rue du Sauvage.

When she came to the number she was seeking, she was so excited that she stood before the door unable to move another step. Poulet was there, in that house! Her hands and knees trembled violently, and it was some moments before she could enter and walk along the passage to the concierge's quarters.

"Will you go and tell M. Paul de Lamare that an old lady friend of his mother's is waiting to see him?" she said, slipping a piece of money into the man's hand.

"He does not live here now, Madame," answered the concierge.

A shudder went over her. She faltered:

"Ah! Where — where is he living now?"

"I do not know."

She felt stunned, as though she were about to fall, and it was some time before she could speak again.

"When did he leave?" she asked at last, controlling herself by a violent effort.

The man was quite ready to tell her all he knew.

"About a fortnight ago," he replied. "They just walked out of the house one evening and didn't come back. They owed all over the neighbourhood, so you can understand that they didn't leave any address."

Tongues of flame were dancing before Jeanne's eyes, as if a gun were being fired off close to her face; but she had one fixed idea in her mind: she wanted to find Poulet, and that upheld her and made her stand there as if she were calmly thinking.

"Then he did not say anything when he left?"

"No, nothing at all; they went away to get out of paying their debts.

"But he will have to send for his letters."

"He'll send a good many times before he gets them, then; besides, they didn't have ten in a twelve-month, though I took them up one two days before they left."

That must have been the one she sent.

"Listen," she said, hastily. "I am his mother, and I have come to look for him. Here are ten francs for yourself. If you hear anything from or about him, let me know at once at the Hôtel de Normandie,

Rue du Havre, and you shall be well paid for your trouble."

"You may depend upon me, Madame," answered the concierge; and Jeanne went away.

She hastened along the streets as if she were bent on an important mission, but she was not looking or caring whither she was going. She walked close to the walls, pushed and buffeted by errand boys and porters; crossed the roads, regardless of the vehicles and the shouts of the drivers; stumbled against the curbstones, which she did not see; and hurried on and on, unconscious of everything and everyone. At last she found herself in a garden, and she felt so weary that she sat down on a seat. She sat there a long while, apparently unaware that the tears were running down her cheeks, and that the passers-by were stopping to look at her. At last the bitter cold made her rise to go, but her legs would hardly carry her, so weak and exhausted was she. She would have liked some soup, but she dared not go into a restaurant, for she knew people could see she was in trouble, and it made her feel timid and ashamed. When she passed one she would stop a moment at the door, look inside, and see all the people sitting at the tables eating, and then go on again, saying to herself: "I will go into the next one"; but when she came to the next her courage always failed her again. In the end she went into a baker's shop, and bought a little crescent-shaped roll, which she ate as she went along. She was very thirsty, but she did not know where to go to get anything to drink, so she went without.

She passed under the arch, and found herself in

another garden surrounded by arcades, and she recognized the Palais Royal. Her walk in the sun had made her warm again, so she sat down for another hour or two. A crowd of people poured into the gardens — an elegant crowd composed of beautiful women and wealthy men, who only lived for dress and pleasure, and who chatted and smiled and bowed as they sauntered along. Feeling ill at ease amidst this brilliant throng, Jeanne rose to go away; but suddenly the thought struck her that perhaps she might meet Paul here, and she began to walk from end to end of the gardens, with hasty, furtive steps, carefully scanning every face she met.

Soon she saw that people turned to look and laugh at her, and she hurried away, thinking it was her odd appearance and her green-checked dress, which Rosalie had chosen and had made up, that attracted everyone's attention and smiles. She hardly dared ask her way, but she did at last venture, and when she had reached her hotel, she passed the rest of the day sitting on a chair at the foot of the bed. In the evening she dined off some soup and a little meat, as on the day before, and then undressed and went to bed, performing all the duties of her toilet quite mechanically, from sheer habit.

The next morning she went to the police department to ask them to find her child. They told her they could not promise her anything, but that they would attend to the matter. After she had left the police station, she wandered about the streets, hoping that she might come across him, and she felt more friendless and forsaken among the busy crowds than she did in the midst of the lonely country.

When she had returned to the hotel in the evening, she was told that a man from M. Paul had asked for her, and was coming again the next day. All the blood in her body seemed suddenly to rush to her heart and she could not close her eyes all night. Perhaps it was Paul himself! Yes, it must be so, although his appearance did not tally with the description the hotel people had given of the man who had called, and when, about nine o'clock in the morning, there came a knock at her door, she cried, "Come in!" expecting her son to rush into her arms held open to receive him.

But it was a stranger who entered — a stranger who began to apologize for disturbing her and to explain that he had come about some money Paul owed him. As he spoke she felt herself beginning to cry, and she tried to hide her tears from the man by wiping them away with the end of her finger as soon as they reached the corners of her eyes. The man had heard of her arrival from the concierge at the Rue du Sauvage, and as he could not find Paul he had come to his mother. He held out a paper, which Jeanne mechanically took; she saw "90 francs" written on it, and she drew out the money and paid the man. She did not go out at all that day, and the next morning more creditors appeared. She gave them all the money she had left, except twenty francs, and wrote and told Rosalie how she was situated.

Until her servant's answer came she passed the days in wandering aimlessly about the streets. She did not know what to do or how to kill the long, miserable hours; there was no one who knew of her

A WOMAN'S LIFE

troubles, or to whom she could go for sympathy, and her one desire was to get away from this city and to return to her little house beside the lonely road, where, a few days before, she had felt she could not bear to live because it was so dull and lonely. Now she was sure she could live nowhere else but in that little home where all her mournful habits had taken root.

At last, one evening, she found a letter from Rosalie awaiting her with two hundred francs enclosed.

“Come back as soon as possible, Madame Jeanne,” wrote the maid, “for I shall send you nothing more. As for M. Paul, I will go and fetch him myself the next time we hear anything from him. — With best respects, your servant,
ROSALIE.”

And Jeanne started back to Batteville one bitterly cold, snowy morning.

XIV.

AFTER her return from Paris, Jeanne would not go out or take any interest in anything. She rose at the same hour every morning, looked out of the window to see what sort of day it was, then went downstairs and sat before the fire in the dining-room. She would sit there for days at a time, perfectly still with her eyes fixed on the flames while she thought of all the sorrows she had passed through. The little room grew darker and darker, but she never moved, except to put more wood on the fire, and when Rosalie brought in the lamp she cried:

“Come, Madame Jeanne, you must stir about a bit, or you won’t be able to eat any dinner again this evening.”

Often she was worried by thoughts which she could not dismiss from her mind, and she allowed herself to be tormented by the veriest trifles, for the most insignificant matters appeared of the greatest importance to her diseased mind. She lived in the memories of the past, and she would think for hours together of her girlhood and her wedding tour in Corsica. The wild scenery that she had long forgotten suddenly appeared before her in the fire, and she could recall every detail, every event, every face connected with the island. The features of Jean

Ravoli, the guide, haunted her, and sometimes she fancied she could even hear his voice.

At other times she thought of the peaceful years of Paul's childhood — of how he used to make her tend the salad plants, and of how she and Aunt Lison used to kneel on the ground, each trying to outdo the other to please the boy, and rear the greater number of plants.

Her lips would form the words, "Poulet, my little Poulet," as if she were talking to him, and she would cease to muse, and try for hours to write in the air the letters which formed her son's name, with her outstretched finger. Slowly she traced them before the fire, fancying she could see them, and, thinking she had made a mistake, she began the word over and over again, forcing herself to write the whole name though her arm trembled with fatigue. At last she would become so nervous that she mixed up the letters, and formed other words, and had to give it up.

She had all the manias and fancies which beset those who lead a solitary life, and it irritated her to the last degree to see the slightest change in the arrangement of the furniture. Rosalie often made her go out with her along the road, but after twenty minutes or so Jeanne would say: "I am tired out, Rosalie," and would sit down by the road-side. Soon movement of any kind became distasteful to her, and she stayed in bed as late as she could. Ever since childhood she had always been in the habit of jumping out of bed as soon as she had drunk her *café au lait*. She was particularly fond of her morning coffee, and she would have missed it more than anything. She always waited for Rosalie to bring

it with an impatience that had a touch of sensuality in it, and as soon as the cup was placed on the bedside table she sat up, and emptied it, somewhat greedily. Then she at once threw back the bed-clothes and began to dress. But gradually she fell into the habit of dreaming for a few moments after she had placed the empty cup back in the saucer, and from that she soon began to lie down again, and at last she stayed in bed every day until Rosalie came back in a temper and dressed her almost by force.

She had no longer the slightest will of her own. Whenever her servant asked her advice, or put any question to her, or wanted to know her opinion, she always answered: "Do as you like, Rosalie." So firmly did she believe herself pursued by a persistent ill luck that she became as great a fatalist as an Oriental, and she was so accustomed to seeing her dreams unfulfilled, and her hopes disappointed, that she did not dare undertake anything fresh, and hesitated for days before she commenced the simplest task, so persuaded was she that whatever she touched would be sure to go wrong.

"I don't think any one could have had more misfortune than I have had all my life," she was always saying.

"How would it be if you had to work for your living, and if you were obliged to get up every morning at six o'clock to go and do a hard day's work?" Rosalie would exclaim. "That's what a great many people have to do, and then when they get too old to work, they die of want."

"But my son has deserted me, and I am all alone," Jeanne would reply.

That enraged Rosalie.

"And what if he has? How about those whose children have to do their military service, or settle in America?" (America, in her eyes, was an undefined country whither people went to make their fortune, and whence they never returned.) "Children always leave their parents sooner or later; old and young people aren't meant to stay together. And then, what if he were dead?" she would finish up savagely, and her mistress could say nothing after that.

Jeanne got a little stronger when the first warm days of spring came, but she only took advantage of her better health to bury herself still deeper in her gloomy thoughts.

She went up to the garret one morning to look for something, and, while she was there, happened to open a box full of old calendars which had been kept according to the custom of some country people.

It seemed as if she had found the past years themselves, and she was filled with emotion as she looked at the pile of square pieces of cardboard. They were of all sizes, big and little, and she took them every one down to the dining-room and began to lay them out on the table in the right order of years. Suddenly she picked up the very first one — the one she had taken with her from the convent to Les Peuples. For a long time she gazed at it with its dates which she had crossed out the day she had left Rouen, the day after leaving the convent, and she began to shed slow, bitter tears — the weak, pitiful tears of an aged woman — as she looked at

these cards spread out before her on the table, and which represented all her wretched life.

Then the thought struck her that by means of these calendars she could recall all that she had ever done, and giving way to the idea, she at once devoted herself to the task of retracing the past. She pinned all the cards, which had grown yellow with age, up on the wall, and then spent hours before one or another of them, thinking, "What did I do in that month?"

She had put a mark beside all the important dates in her life, and sometimes, by means of linking together and adding one to the other, all the little circumstances which had preceded and followed a great event, she succeeded in remembering a whole month. By dint of concentrated attention, and efforts of will and of memory, she retraced nearly the whole of her first two years at Les Peuples, recalling without much difficulty this far-away period of her life, for it seemed to stand out in relief. But the following years were shrouded in a sort of fog and seemed to run one into another, and sometimes she pored over a calendar for hours without being able to remember whether it was even in that year that such and such a thing had happened. She would go slowly round the dining-room looking at these images of past years, which, to her, were as pictures of an ascent to Calvary, until one of them arrested her attention and then she would sit gazing at it all the rest of the day, absorbed in her recollections.

Soon the sap began to rise in the trees; the seeds were springing up, the leaves were budding and the air was filled with the faint, sweet smell of the apple

blossoms which made the orchards a glowing mass of pink. As summer approached Jeanne became very restless. She could not keep still; she went in and out twenty times a day, and, as she rambled along past the farms, she worked herself into a perfect fever of regret.

A daisy half hidden in the grass, a sunbeam falling through the leaves, or the reflection of the sky in a splash of water in a rut was enough to agitate and affect her, for their sight brought back a kind of echo of the emotions she had felt when, as a young girl, she had wandered dreamily through the fields; and though now there was nothing to which she could look forward, the soft yet exhilarating air sent the same thrill through her as when all her life had lain before her. But this pleasure was not unalloyed with pain, and it seemed as if the universal joy of the awakening world could now only impart a delight which was half sorrow to her grief-crushed soul and withered heart. Everything around her seemed to have changed. Surely the sun was hardly so warm as in her youth, the sky so deep a blue, the grass so fresh a green? And the flowers, paler and less sweet, could no longer arouse within her the exquisite ecstasies of delight as of old. On certain days she was filled with such a sense of well-being that she found herself dreaming and hoping again; for, however cruel Fate may be, is it possible to give way to utter despair when the sun shines and the sky is blue?

She went on aimlessly, for hours and hours, straight in front of her, urged on and on by her inward excitement, and sometimes she would suddenly

stop and sit down by the road-side to think of her troubles. Why had she not been loved like other women? Why had even the simple pleasures of an uneventful existence been refused her?

Sometimes, again forgetting for a moment that she was old, that there was no longer any pleasure in store for her, and that, with the exception of a few more lonely years, her life was over and done, she would build all sorts of castles in the air and make plans for such a happy future, just as she had done when she was sixteen. Then, suddenly remembering the bitter reality, she would get up again, feeling as if a heavy load had fallen upon her, and return home, murmuring:

"Oh, you old fool! You old fool!"

Now Rosalie was always saying to her:

"Do keep still, Madame. What on earth makes you want to run about so?"

"I can't help it," Jeanne would reply sadly. "I am like Massacre before he died."

One morning Rosalie went into her mistress's room earlier than usual.

"Make haste and drink up your coffee," she said as she placed the cup on the table. "Denis is waiting to take us to Les Peuples. I have to go over there on business."

Jeanne was so excited that she thought she would have fainted, and, as she dressed herself with trembling fingers, she could hardly believe she was going to see her dear home once more.

Overhead was a bright, blue sky, and, as they went along, Denis's pony would every now and then break into a gallop out of sheer good humour. When

they reached Etouvent, Jeanne could hardly breathe, her heart beat so quickly, and when she saw the brick pillars beside the château gate, she exclaimed, "Oh," two or three times in a low voice, as if she were in the presence of something which stirred her very soul, and she could not help herself.

They put up the horse at the Couillards' farm, and, when Rosalie and her son went to attend to their business, the farmer asked Jeanne if she would like to go over the château, as the owner was away, and gave her the key.

She went off alone, and when she found herself opposite the old manor she stood still to look at it. The outside had not been touched since she had left. All the shutters were closed, and the sunbeams were dancing on the gray walls of the big, weather-beaten building. A little piece of wood fell on her dress, she looked up and saw that it had fallen from the plane-tree, and she went up to the big tree and stroked its pale, smooth bark as if it had been alive. Her foot touched a piece of rotten wood lying in the grass; it was the last fragment of the seat on which she had so often sat with her loved ones — the seat which had been put up the very day of Julien's first visit to the château.

Then she went to the hall-door. She had some difficulty in opening it as the key was rusty and would not turn, but at last the lock gave way, and the door itself only required a slight push before it swung back. The first thing Jeanne did was to run up to her own room. It had been hung with a light paper and she hardly knew it again, but when she opened one of the windows and looked out, she was

moved almost to tears as she saw again the scene she loved so well — the thicket, the elms, the heath, and the sea covered with brown sails which, at this distance, looked as if they were motionless.

Then she went all over the big, empty house. She saw the familiar stains on the walls. She stopped to look at a little hole in the plaster which the baron had made with his cane, for he used to make a few thrusts at the wall whenever he passed this spot, in memory of the fencing bouts he had had in his youth. In her mother's bedroom she found a small gold-headed pin stuck in the wall behind the door, in a dark corner near the bed. She had stuck it there a long while ago (she remembered it now), and had looked everywhere for it since, but it had never been found; and she kissed it and took it with her as a priceless relic.

She went into every room, recognizing the almost invisible spots and marks on the hangings which had not been changed and again noting the odd forms and faces which the imagination so often traces in the designs of the furniture coverings, the carvings of mantelpieces and the shadows on soiled ceilings. She walked through the vast, silent *château* as noiselessly as if she were in a cemetery; all her life was interred there.

She went down to the drawing-room. The closed shutters made it very dark, and it was a few moments before she could distinguish anything; then as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, she gradually made out the tapestry with the birds on it. Two arm-chairs stood before the fireplace, looking as if they had just been vacated, and the very

smell of the room — a smell that had always been peculiar to it, as each human being has his, a smell which could be perceived at once, and yet was vague like all the faint perfumes of old rooms — brought the memories crowding to Jeanne's mind.

Her breath came quickly as she stood with her eyes fixed on the two chairs, inhaling this perfume of the past; and, all at once, in a sudden hallucination occasioned by her thoughts, she fancied she saw — she did see — her father and mother with their feet on the fender as she had so often seen them before. She drew back in terror, stumbling against the door-frame, and clung to it for support, still keeping her eyes fixed on the arm-chairs. The vision disappeared and for some minutes she stood horror-stricken; then she slowly regained possession of herself and turned to fly, afraid that she was going mad. Her eyes fell on the wainscoting against which she was leaning and she saw Poulet's ladder. There were all the faint marks traced on the wall at unequal intervals and the figures which had been cut with a pen-knife to indicate the month, and the child's age and growth. In some places there was the Baron's big writing, in others her own, a little smaller, in others again Aunt Lison's, which was a little shaky. She could see the boy standing there now, with his fair hair and his little forehead pressed against the wall to have his height measured, while the Baron exclaimed: "Jeanne, he has grown half an inch in six weeks," and she began to kiss the wainscoting in a frenzy of love.

Then she heard Rosalie's voice outside, calling: "Madame Jeanne! Madame Jeanne! lunch is wait-

ing," and she went out with her head in a whirl. She felt unable to understand anything that was said to her. She ate what was placed before her, listened to what was being said without realizing the sense of the words, answered the farmers' wives when they inquired after her health, passively received their kisses and kissed the cheeks which were offered to her, and then got into the chaise again.

When she could no longer see the high roof of the château through the trees, something within her seemed to break, and she felt that she had just said good-bye to her old home for ever.

They went straight back to Batteville, and as she was going indoors Jeanne saw something white under the door; it was a letter which the postman had slipped there during their absence. She at once recognised Paul's handwriting and tore open the envelope in an agony of anxiety. He wrote:

"MY DEAR MOTHER: I have not written before because I did not want to bring you to Paris on a fruitless errand, for I have always been meaning to come and see you myself. At the present moment I am in great trouble and difficulty. My wife gave birth to a little girl three days ago, and now she is dying and I have not a penny. I do not know what to do with the child; the concierge is trying to nourish it with a feeding-bottle as best she can, but I fear I shall lose it. Could you not take it? I cannot send it to a wet nurse as I have no money, and I absolutely do not know what to do. Pray answer by return of post.

"Your loving son,
"PAUL."

Jeanne dropped on a chair with hardly enough strength left to call Rosalie. The maid came and they read the letter over again together, and then sat looking at each other in silence.

"I'll go and fetch the child myself, Madame," said Rosalie at last. "We can't leave it to die."

"Very well, my girl, go," answered Jeanne.

"Put on your hat, Madame," said the maid, after a pause, "and we will go and see the lawyer at Goderville. If that woman is going to die, M. Paul must marry her for the sake of the child."

Jeanne put on her hat without a word. Her heart was overflowing with joy, but she would not have allowed any one to see it for the world, for it was one of those detestable joys in which people can revel in their hearts, but of which they are, nevertheless, ashamed; her son's mistress was going to die.

The lawyer gave Rosalie detailed instructions which the servant made him repeat two or three times; then, when she was sure she knew exactly what to do, she said:

"Don't you fear; I'll see it's all right now." And she started for Paris that very night.

Jeanne passed two days in such an agony of mind that she could fix her thoughts on nothing. The third morning she received a line from Rosalie, merely saying she was coming back by that evening's train; nothing more; and about three o'clock, Jeanne sent round to a neighbour to ask him if he would drive her to the Beuzeville railway station to meet her servant.

She stood on the platform, her eyes fixed on the straight rails, which seemed to run off and meet far

away on the horizon. Every now and then she would look at the clock. Ten minutes more—five minutes—two—and at last the train was due, though as yet nothing was visible on the line. Then, all at once, she saw a cloud of white smoke, and underneath it a black speck which got rapidly larger and larger. The big engine came into the station, snorting and slackening its speed, and Jeanne looked eagerly into every window as the carriages went past her.

The doors opened and several people got out—peasants in blouses, farmers' wives with baskets on their arms, a few gentlemen in soft hats—and at last Rosalie appeared, carrying what looked like a bundle of linen in her arms. Jeanne would have stepped forward to meet her, but all strength seemed to have left her legs and she feared she would fall if she moved. The maid saw her and came up in her ordinary, calm way.

"Good-day, Madame; here I am again, though I've had some bother to get along."

"Well?" gasped Jeanne.

"Well," answered Rosalie, "she died last night. They were married and here's the baby," and she held out the child, which could not be seen for its wraps. Jeanne mechanically took it, and they left the station and got into the carriage which was waiting.

"M. Paul is coming directly after the funeral. I suppose he'll be here to-morrow, by this train."

"Paul—" murmured Jeanne, and then stopped without saying anything more.

The sun was sinking towards the horizon, bath-

ing in a glow of light the green fields, which were flecked here and there with golden colza flowers and blood-red poppies, and over the quiet earth, full of sap, fell an infinite peace.

The chaise was going at a quick pace, the peasant clicking his tongue to urge on the horse. Jeanne looked straight up into the sky, which seemed to be cut asunder by the circular flight of swallows that looked like rockets.

All at once she became conscious of a soft warmth, the warmth of life, which was making itself felt through her skirts, penetrating her legs and her whole body; it was the heat from the tiny being sleeping on her knees. She was filled with a great emotion. She suddenly drew back the covering from the child she had not yet seen, her son's daughter. As the light fell on its face the little creature opened its blue eyes, and moved its lips, and then Jeanne hugged it close to her, and, raising it in her arms, began to cover it with kisses.

"Come, come, Madame Jeanne, have done," said Rosalie, in sharp, though good-tempered tones; "you'll make the child cry."

Then she added, as if in reply to her own thoughts:

"Life, after all, is never so good nor so bad as people think."

[illegible]

SEP 18 1958		
-------------	--	--

MAR 24 '65			
------------	--	--	--

MAY 14 69			
-----------	--	--	--

MAY 28 1999			
APR 1 1999			

APR 18 '73			

		
---	--	--

WHEATON COLLEGE -- NORTON, MA 02766

WHEE PQ2349.A4 E52 v.4

The collected novels and stories of Guy de Maupassant
82744



3 6307 00069506 1

PQ v.4
2349 Maupassant, Guy de
A4 Collected novels and
E52 stories.

82744

DATE

ISSUED TO

82744

PQ
2349
A4
E52
v.4

